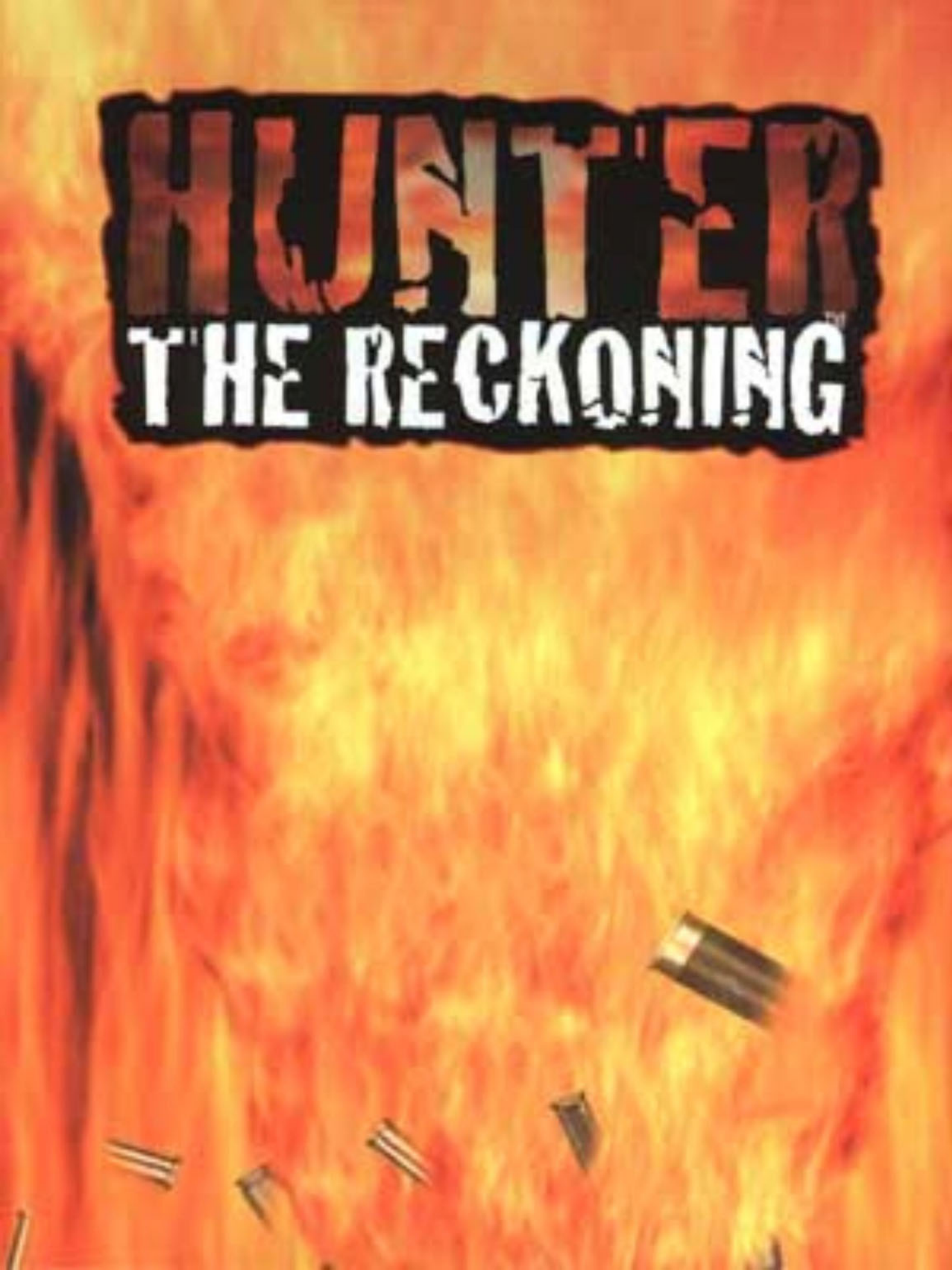
HUNTER
THE RECKONING

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Welcome to Hunter-Net

Prologue: "Inherit the Earth"

That was the first thing they said to me, the first time I was "contacted." In that moment a horrendous revelation befell me. The world was not what it had always seemed. The life I'd led had been an illusion. My job, my family, my dreams, they were all deceptions. All the reassurances that my parents and then society made — that there was nothing to fear, that everything would be okay — were a lie.

What happened to me? What am I talking about? It all comes down to this: Monsters are real. They exist. I've seen them.

I don't mean "people can be monsters," or "the human dark side is monstrous" or "society creates its own monsters." That's all bullshit. I mean walking and in some cases living creatures, neither man nor nature, exist, hide in the shadows and prey upon people. When you were a kid and afraid of things under your bed or outside your window, you were right to be scared. They were there, watching, waiting. As we grew up, we just turned a blind eye in a subconscious effort to remain sane, to refuse to believe that creatures prowled the night. They do.

I don't expect you to believe me. Most people who visit this site write me off as a crackpot. That's fine; they couldn't understand if they tried. Their minds' own defenses and the influences that have been imposed upon them for so long won't let them believe. Better that they visit another site.

For those of you who understand, who've seen what I've seen, who know what I know... you have my condolences. We're trapped between people who shout us down, think us mad or turn their backs and the very creatures responsible for it all — the hideous things we must face every day and every night.

You're Not Alone

But let me back up a bit, to assure you that you're among friends. I know what you're going through. You can't look anywhere without seeing something that tears at your very soul — a grotesque walking corpse, a shambling man-beast, a person you *know* to be dead, or some kind of spirit clinging to an unwitting person's body. They hide or stroll among us, unnoticed by everyone. They pick and choose who to kill and who to spare, who to save for later and who to devour now, and we have — or had — no idea it was ever happening. But now we see it all the time, and the people we see poised to become victims won't listen. They refuse to believe us. And then, there they go, off to their doom.

Let me guess: Your family wonders what's wrong with you; you're "agitated," "freaking out." Co-workers avoid you these days; you're "unstable," "acting weird." Maybe you've already been fired; it's hard to keep your job when you attack a "colleague." Of course, no one believed you when you explained what she *really* was. But then she knew you were on to her.... Perhaps you've been arrested recently for assault, disturbing the peace or on weapons charges. Not even the police believe your stories, what your victims really are, or why you attacked them. They want you in a cell or committed, where they and *other things* have you within reach.

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Sound familiar? Then here's probably the most relieving thing you've read in some time: You've been right all along. You're not insane. There are others like you. You've found us. The bad part is, being sane and right means that everything you've witnessed, everything you've feared, is real. Monsters exist.

The Imbued

There are others of us out here. We've all struggled with the horrifying visions and incomprehensible realities that you face. We've all had to come to grips with what we know, what we've witnessed and what we've become. I created this site in an effort to exorcise my own demons, to find a catharsis, but to also reach out to others enduring the same torture. You're welcome to join this list of peers, all of whom search for answers to what's real in the world — how it is that we've lived our entire lives ignorant of the fact that monsters exist, that they control us and the world like puppets on a stage.

We few on this list call ourselves the imbued — a strange name, I know, but it seems to capture what everyone has reported of their personal experiences.

Not long ago you were perfectly normal. Your life carried on as it always had. Times could be tough, money could be short, the future could look pretty damn bleak. Then, for some reason, sometime recently, things changed. Accounts vary, but everyone on this forum has reported events along these lines: A voice entered your head. It sounded like your own, or maybe like the Word of God itself. Or maybe you were reading a newspaper or billboard and for a fleeting moment the words changed right before your eyes. The message was mysterious but emphatic: "DO NOT SUFFER IT TO LIVE." "DEATH WALKS AMONG YOU." "SAVE THIS ONE AND ALL WILL FIND SALVATION." Or, in my case, "INHERIT THE EARTH."

Perhaps you received no message, but found yourself in a dream, some kind of hallucination in which terrible things appeared and happened. Or you could have been assaulted by a piercing sound, overcome by a nauseating stench or struck by a profound sense that someone was dancing on your grave.

Whatever happened, that was just the beginning. The next moments were probably a blur, but all your senses were brought to bear on some kind of creature, maybe even two or more, that appeared out of nowhere or simply emerged from a crowd.

This List

This website and its list are intended as means for helping the imbued come to terms with themselves, the world and the truth. They are intended to help people with our condition to understand themselves and what appears to be the *real* reality. You may have come here for the first time, desperate for answers or confirmation that *this is how it is now*. Or you may have come here for the first time after finding your own meaning, and now you need help to carry on.

Ultimately, this list is about communication, to reassure and support one another and to share whatever information we can about *them*. Together we stand. Divided we fall. When you join the list, you remain anonymous. No one, myself included, learns who or where you are, and no one will as long as you remain discreet in your posts. That said, share everything you know and learn about *them*. Your knowledge could mean the difference between life and death for other members.

However, understand this: ***They*** could be among us. These creatures already seem to pervade the world. It would naive of us to believe that they are not pervasive on the Internet, as well. The enemy may infiltrate this list, pose as one of us or simply lurk, as they do in all other things, and wait for signs of some weakness to prey upon. So, learn what you can from this list, but do not take it all as gospel. One member's information may save you. Another "member's" may get you killed.

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You instinctively knew that this thing was not supposed to exist, that it was evil incarnate and that everyone in its vicinity was in mortal danger. You could not stand idly by. You could not simply gape. You had to do something!

It may have been that you were not alone. Although many people in the area may have been oblivious to what you saw, others responded to it as you did. Apparently, a handful sensed the same thing you did. The crowd scattered at the commotion while you dove recklessly toward a creature you could not identify, yet you knew could not be abided.

That's when you demonstrated The Power. By whatever means, you were *imbued* with strange abilities. Though you never did anything like it before, you could now deliver hammer blows. You could keep innocents from harm with a simple command. You could look to the creature's very soul and know its innermost secrets. And you could do these things as easily as you closed your hand, spoke aloud or cast a piercing gaze.

When the red haze passed, the monster was driven off or destroyed, with no sign left of its existence. In that moment of realization you probably fled the scene and denied what happened.

The truth is, you were "imbued," chosen. The clarity, strength and passion to see reality for what it truly is was granted or inflicted upon you. Curse or blessing, your life changed forever.

The Heralds

"I must be going insane," you probably thought after hearing voices, having hallucinations and pulling some bizarre stunts. You're not crazy. All of the imbued have heard the voices and seen the signs. We have labeled the source "Heralds" or "Messengers," for lack of a better term, or simply to give the complete unknown some kind of familiarity. The few of us who have found each other, whether through word of mouth, on the streets or through the Internet, disagree about who or what the Heralds are. The products of mass delirium? Collective unconscious lashing outward? God or some kind of deity? Aliens broadcasting to certain people? A government plot to manipulate us and make us weapons? Or our own subconscious minds responding to the anxieties of the world or perhaps its end? No one knows.

Yet the messages seem real enough, given that we have all experienced them. General consensus on the Heralds and what they communicate holds that both are connected to our contact with monsters. Messages seem to come to awaken us to the existence of horrific creatures, ones we feel compelled to react to, and we're then somehow empowered with the tools to do so. Some imbued even claim to have repeated contact with the Heralds, to receive further messages warning of impending danger or confrontation with... what, the supernatural?

Are these Messengers or Heralds the ones responsible for what we witness, and for our freakish abilities? Why do they choose us? What is our purpose? Why not explain themselves? Who are they?

We don't know. All we can do is guess and hope we're right.

Monsters

I feel silly writing that word, as if I defy everything sensible that I've ever been taught... or perhaps that forces have ever wanted me to believe.

After your initial exposure — the imbuing — you probably sought meaning in the experience, some hope of explaining it all away and returning to the sheltered existence you used to lead. But there was no escape, was there?

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Welcome to Hunter-Net

No matter how much you shut your eyes or turned away, you saw creatures everywhere: on the street, on television, at work, on the subway, in the newspaper and, for some, God save you, in your own homes!

All you wanted to do was get away and put a disturbing, inexplicable episode behind you. But *they* wouldn't let you. The creatures were everywhere, despite your best efforts not to see. You had to make a decision: Seek professional help, commit suicide, go mad or face what you hoped could not exist. If only someone else could confirm what you were seeing, what you knew. But no one could. They thought you were insane, looked at you askance and, you feared, spread word that you were trouble... that you *knew.*

Before long, trouble probably came to you. The police or doctors wanted to find a place for you, to protect you from yourself, and to make sure you couldn't harm anyone else. That's when you knew there was no one to turn to. These blind people, like the frantic crowds at the moment of your change, offered no salvation. Although the others like you — others who *did something* that night — might....

You may have returned to the "scene of the crime" in search of the others who fought alongside you. Maybe you hoped to be killed by a creature and laid yourself out as bait, only to find a kindred spirit rather than an evil one. News stories about other bizarre events may have put you in search of other people with similar experiences. Or you may have searched for answers online and found yourself here. But finding others like you only confirmed that the creatures you saw were real.

We don't know where the monsters come from, but sporadic contact with the chosen from around the world suggests that these things are everywhere. Maybe they're born of our own sins. Perhaps we're not at the top of the order as we've always believed — or been led to believe — and these abominations are. Perhaps they're older than humanity itself, some kind of superior race that's always been here.

The fact that we've never seen these things before — and that most people still don't — seems to lend credence to the theory that monsters have been around for a very long time. A new threat couldn't be so pervasive, so insidious. A new threat couldn't already have human pawns, willing and unwilling. (Yes, there's evidence to suggest that some people have been exposed to monsters and work with them, willingly or unwittingly. I personally have seen human agents of the "masters," and these people have incredible strength, probably granted as gifts for loyalty. Others report authorities including the police and politicians under monster control; imbued have made the mistake of revealing themselves to creatures only to find themselves arrested on false charges soon afterward....)

So, for our own preservation, we must assume that monsters are everywhere. They seem entrenched, and they appear to have time on their side. But what are they? Frustratingly, we don't know that, either. Our best guesses relate back to old stories and folk tales. Creatures that drink blood, people that can change shape into animals and objects, witches and warlocks who can cast spells and invoke curses, ghosts that haunt places and people. But are the old stories true? Do vampires and werewolves exist? And if we hope to do anything about it, are the old tricks useful against them? Will a cross save your life? Does garlic keep them at bay? Can they bear their own reflection? Or are the legends just as false as we've always been led to believe?

There's only one way find out.

The Hunt

One of the prevailing questions that arises after you come to terms with what you've seen and what you've become is "Why?" "Why have I become this?" "What am I supposed to do?" Maybe the Heralds

have a specific goal for us. Maybe the imbuing is completely random. Maybe we're supposed to decide our own fate.

If your feelings and ethics are anything like mine, there can be only one purpose for our change. We can't be made to witness what we do, to possess the abilities we do and to have the knowledge we have without reason. There's too much coincidence involved for the change to be purely random. When I walk the street and see figures lurking in the shadows, picking people out like candy behind glass, my soul allows only one response: to fight back. I cannot sit idly by while innocent, unaware people are manipulated and slaughtered. I couldn't stand by the moment I was changed, and I can't do it now. Nor, probably, can you. You wouldn't have come in search of this site if you hadn't sensed some purpose. What you needed was reassurance that fulfilling that purpose was the right thing to do.

The members on this list call our perceived purpose "the hunt." We dedicate ourselves to learning *the truth*, and to stalking and perhaps destroying monsters. Of course, you don't have to be on some glorified mailing list to have made the same commitment. Before you arrived here, you might have accepted this imperative, too. "The hunt" simply means knowing that monsters are inherently wrong. It means finding them, shadowing them, learning about them and ultimately confronting them. Some hunters believe that creatures' destruction is the only answer. Others express concern that monsters may be the products of people gone wrong, that killing them damns a soul. They hope (and fear) that some small glimmer of humanity lingers in these creatures and should be recovered if any good is to be accomplished. Your approach to the hunt is your own, something you have to rationalize according to your own sensibilities. But however you approach it, you must do what you believe is right in your heart, or the things we have to do may one day turn you into one of *them*.

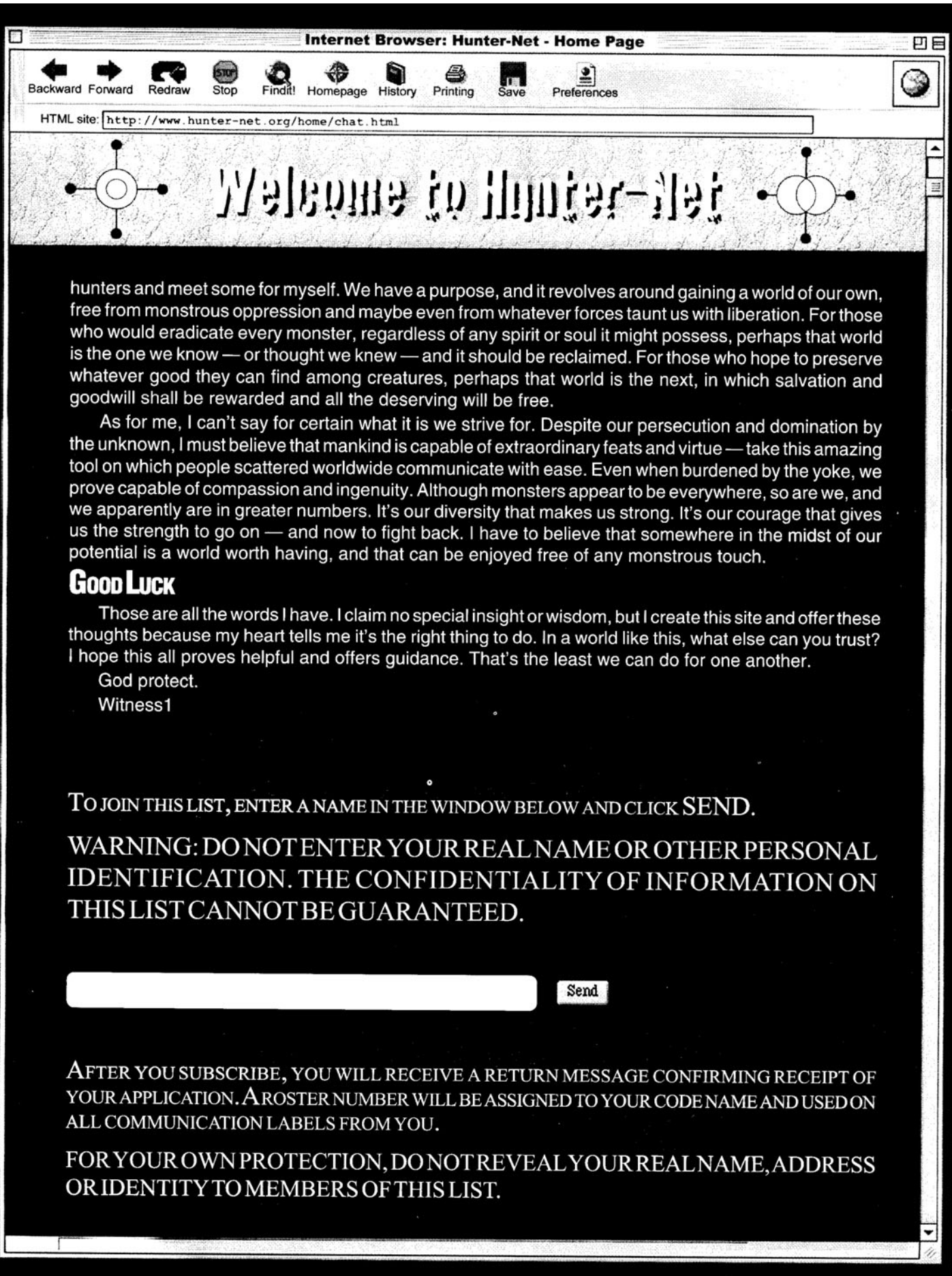
Is That All?

Some hunters grimly believe that facing and dealing with monsters is the be-all and end-all of the imbuing and our existence (I would say they're content with this purpose; none of us could ever be content with our new lives). Yet is that our full extent?

I said earlier that the events of our imbuing are too coincidental to be random. Pure chance cannot account for why we suddenly see the world differently and why we manifest strange abilities. Maybe if the change happened to only one person in the whole world, then *maybe* it could be random. But it doesn't, and it isn't. The change affects people everywhere, apparently often in small groups at the same time. No, there's a bigger game being played, even if we can't perceive the players.

The only answer I can accept for now is that we are pawns of greater forces, powers that seek to accomplish a goal, great or small, and that turn to mankind to see it done. Whether that's a compliment or a slander, a blessing or a curse, I can't say. Yet when I, other imbued, and perhaps even you sense that we have a moral responsibility, that we must respond to the monsters we see, I must conclude that we pursue a greater good. We have been changed, and we dedicate our new selves to serving and protecting humanity, regardless that family and friends don't understand or appreciate it. Maybe it's that simple resolve, the need to make the world better, that makes us candidates for the imbuing.

The first words I received from the Messengers were "INHERIT THE EARTH." I've thought about those words constantly in the few months since my change. They still have no more logical meaning than they did in the context I heard them, but I suspect that they garner intuitive meaning as I hear of more



hunters and meet some for myself. We have a purpose, and it revolves around gaining a world of our own, free from monstrous oppression and maybe even from whatever forces taunt us with liberation. For those who would eradicate every monster, regardless of any spirit or soul it might possess, perhaps that world is the one we know — or thought we knew — and it should be reclaimed. For those who hope to preserve whatever good they can find among creatures, perhaps that world is the next, in which salvation and goodwill shall be rewarded and all the deserving will be free.

As for me, I can't say for certain what it is we strive for. Despite our persecution and domination by the unknown, I must believe that mankind is capable of extraordinary feats and virtue — take this amazing tool on which people scattered worldwide communicate with ease. Even when burdened by the yoke, we prove capable of compassion and ingenuity. Although monsters appear to be everywhere, so are we, and we apparently are in greater numbers. It's our diversity that makes us strong. It's our courage that gives us the strength to go on — and now to fight back. I have to believe that somewhere in the midst of our potential is a world worth having, and that can be enjoyed free of any monstrous touch.

Good Luck

Those are all the words I have. I claim no special insight or wisdom, but I create this site and offer these thoughts because my heart tells me it's the right thing to do. In a world like this, what else can you trust? I hope this all proves helpful and offers guidance. That's the least we can do for one another.

God protect.

Witness1

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HUNTER
THE RECKONING™

A STORYTELLING GAME OF RIGHTEOUS FURY

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Disclaimer

Hunter: The Reckoning is a game. Like board games, you play it around a table with friends. The difference here is there is no board, and there may not even be any pieces. However, it's still a game. It is *not* real life. Monsters are the products of our imaginations. They are not real. You are not a monster hunter. It's that simple. If you can't distinguish reality from fantasy, put this book down and walk away. For everyone else, have fun.

WHITE WOLF
GAME STUDIO

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PRINTED IN CANADA.

HUNTER
THE RECKONING™

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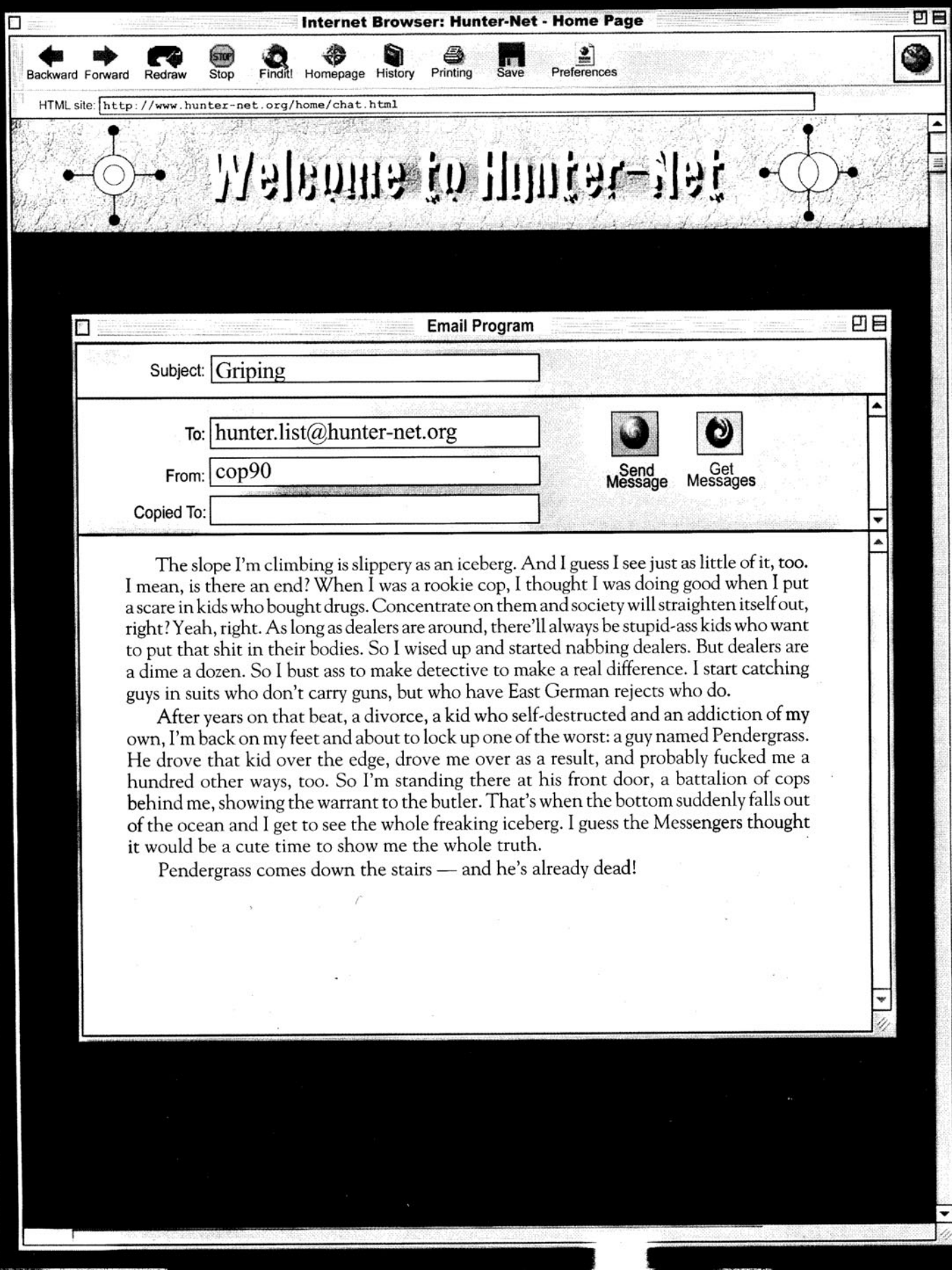
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The slope I'm climbing is slippery as an iceberg. And I guess I see just as little of it, too. I mean, is there an end? When I was a rookie cop, I thought I was doing good when I put a scare in kids who bought drugs. Concentrate on them and society will straighten itself out, right? Yeah, right. As long as dealers are around, there'll always be stupid-ass kids who want to put that shit in their bodies. So I wised up and started nabbing dealers. But dealers are a dime a dozen. So I bust ass to make detective to make a real difference. I start catching guys in suits who don't carry guns, but who have East German rejects who do.
After years on that beat, a divorce, a kid who self-destructed and an addiction of my own, I'm back on my feet and about to lock up one of the worst: a guy named Pendergrass. He drove that kid over the edge, drove me over as a result, and probably fucked me a hundred other ways, too. So I'm standing there at his front door, a battalion of cops behind me, showing the warrant to the butler. That's when the bottom suddenly falls out of the ocean and I get to see the whole freaking iceberg. I guess the Messengers thought it would be a cute time to show me the whole truth.
Pendergrass comes down the stairs — and he's already dead!

INTRODUCTION

Thou art my battle ax and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms;
— Jeremiah 51:20

Monsters.

Nightmarish abominations of man and nature hell-bent on murder and destruction. The malignant offspring of overactive imaginations given form to haunt the night. Human fears and passions made manifest to further the very terror that birthed them. The things that go bump in the night.

Humanity's fear of the unknown has inspired us to create all manner of abominations and obscenities. Whether it's a dark corner, a deranged mind or the next world, human imagination has aspired to fill the void in an effort to make sense of our existence and all its mysteries. Although science seeks to answer our questions and make the world sensible — to explain that monsters *do not exist* — the human imagination still takes us back to times past, when the dark places and other worlds were frightening.

Persistent fear of monsters, even in this "enlightened" age, raises the question: Is belief in creatures integral to the human psyche? That's what science claims; "monsters" are the results of psychoses, sexual deviancy, products of the subconscious mind. Why else could we fear the dark places when reason and rationality have illuminated so much? Monsters aren't real....

Or are they? Imagine a world in which creatures of the night have lurked in the shadows from the very beginning. Feeding on human fears and bodies. Playing with us like toys in ageless, demented power struggles. Deciding human fate and keeping us under their collective thumb or trapped in a talon-grip. Subjecting us to their unknowable will for their own obscene amusement.

Now stop imagining, because it's true. That's our world. That's us. Monsters cast their shadow over our lives and chill our very souls. We are subjected to terror, oppression and corruption, but we never see what's real. We never know the truth. At least... most don't.

You stand apart from the helpless masses. You've had the scales ripped from your eyes. You see the creatures working their manipulations. You recognize the fetid putrescence beneath their innocuous masks. You peer into the deepest shadows and witness their lurid dance. You see everything. You know *the truth*.

And somehow, by some unseen hand, you have been granted the power to stop them. You have the clarity and strength to emancipate humanity, to wrest control from the supernatural. You have the power to finally, once and for all, free the world.

You are a hunter.

Storytelling

The book you hold is the core rulebook for **Hunter: The Reckoning**, a storytelling game from White Wolf Publishing. With the rules in this book, you and your friends can assume the roles of monster hunters and tell stories about your characters' triumphs, failures, dark deeds and glimmers of hope.

In a storytelling game, players create characters using the rules in this book, then take those characters through dramas and adventures called (appropriately enough) stories. Stories are told through a combination of the wishes of the players and the directives of the Storyteller (see below).

In a lot of ways, storytelling resembles games such as *How to Host a Murder*. Each player takes the role of a character — in this case, a person who hunts monsters — and engages in a form of improvisational theater by saying what the hunter would say and describing what the hunter would do. Most of this process is free form — players can have their characters say or do whatever they like, so long as the dialogue or actions are consistent with a character's personality and abilities. However, the success of certain actions is best determined through the use of dice and the rules presented in this book.

Whenever rules and story conflict, story wins. Use the rules only as much — or preferably as little — as you need to tell thrilling tales of terror, action and triumph.

Players and Storytellers

Hunter is best played with a group, or troupe, of two to six participants. Most of these people are players. They create hunter characters — imaginary protagonists similar to ones found in novels, cinema and comics. In each troupe, however, one person must take the role of the Storyteller. The Storyteller does not create one primary character for herself. Rather, she acts as a combination of director, moderator, narrator and referee. By creating plots and conflicts from her imagination the Storyteller invents the drama through which the players direct their characters. The Storyteller also takes the roles of supporting cast — both allies with whom the characters interact and antagonists against whom the characters struggle. The Storyteller invents the salient details of the story's setting — the bars, nightclubs, businesses and other institutions the characters frequent. The players decide how their characters react to the situations in the game, but it is the Storyteller (with the help of the rules) who decides whether the characters actually succeed in their endeavors and, if so, how well. Ultimately, the Storyteller is the final authority on the events that take place in the game.

Example: Ed, Pauline, Kathy and Fred have gathered to play ***Hunter****. Ed, Pauline and Kathy are players: Ed plays Pete Gorzki, an Avenger (a hunter intent on eradicating monsters); Pauline plays Kara Reed, a Visionary (a hunter who seeks to understand monsters' very nature); and Kathy plays Emil Patel, a Martyr (a hunter who protects humans from monsters through personal sacrifice). Fred is the Storyteller. He decrees that the characters have been ambushed by pawns of the enemy, apparently by creatures with a purpose beyond simple murder. The characters awake to find themselves tied up on the floor of a dank basement or warehouse. Before them looms their apparent captor, the bloodsucker whom they've been stalking for several nights.*

• Fred (describing the scene): Your eyes flutter open and you immediately wish you could resume your blissful slumber. Pain stabs through your head and body. You struggle to make sense of what's going on. Your last memories are of trailing your quarry from a nightclub and along a deserted street. You had thought this might be an opportunity to strike — when the tables suddenly turned on *you*. A gang of punks swarmed out of nowhere and attacked the three of you. You fought back, but your assailants' fearsome strength quickly proved more than human, and you were subdued.

Now you're here, bound and prone on a cold, concrete floor, blood congealing and bruises forming where baseball bats and tire irons were used on you in all the wrong ways. You should have known it was a trap; here's the very creature you planned to take out, leering over your bodies. Your efforts to shadow him may have failed — after all, here you are — but they have clearly kept the bastard from feeding. His skin is pallid, almost bone-white, without the rosy flush of others' blood. His dark, curly, contrasting hair doesn't warm his complexion, and neither does this gloomy place.

• Fred (again, now speaking as the monster): "Well, well, so we're all here. I'm so pleased you could finally meet the host after crashing the party all this time. Normally, I would have killed you when I noticed you nights ago. But why bother? There are so many fish in the sea, and you were just small fry — or so I thought. It wasn't till I saw you again... and again... that I knew something was up. You've learned my secret. You know what I am. Impressive.

"Of course, now I have to kill you. You know too much. But before you go, I want to know 'how': How did you find me out? And how were you able to keep up?"

The players may now decide what to do:

• Kathy (speaking as Emil Patel): "Oh, it wasn't difficult once we knew what you were. Go among the soulless masses and their king shows himself eventually."

• Ed (whispering as Pete): "Keep him talking. I have an idea."

• Pauline (speaking as Kara): "Yeah, you weren't so hard to root out. I actually walked up to you face to face weeks ago at a club and tried to call you out. You didn't even notice me. I was just another bag of blood. But I knew what *you* were."

• Fred (playing the bloodsucker's reaction): The creature's lip curls back in a snarl to reveal the long canines of a predator — a two-legged one.

• Ed (describing Pete's action): I plan to cut free using Cleave (an amazing hunter power) and try to take the thing by surprise: "Hey asshole, have you ever seen one of us do this?"

What happens next is decided by the actions of the players and the decisions of the Storyteller. As you can see,

each player is the arbiter of his or her own character's actions and words. Ultimately, though, it is Fred, the Storyteller, who determines the monster's response to the characters' words and actions. It is Fred, speaking as the beast, who roleplays its reaction. And it is Fred who determines whether the characters' actions, if any, succeed or fail.

What Is This Place?

The world of **Hunter: The Reckoning** is not our own, though it is close enough for fearsome discomfort. Rather, the world inhabited by hunters and monsters is *like* ours, but seen through a glass darkly. Evil is palpable and ubiquitous in this world; the end is upon us, and the whole planet teeters on a razor's edge of tension. It is a world of darkness.

Superficially, the World of Darkness is like the "real" world we all inhabit. The same bands are popular, violence plagues the inner city, graft and corruption infest governments, and society looks to cities for its culture. The World of Darkness has a Statue of Liberty, an Eiffel Tower and a McDonalds on every corner. More present there than in our world, though, is an undercurrent of horror — our world's ills are all the more pronounced in the World of Darkness. Its fears are more real. Its governments are *more* degenerate. Its ecosystem dies a bit more each night. And there, monsters exist.

Many of the differences between our world and the World of Darkness stem from these monsters: ancient and inscrutable creatures, ghosts, zombies, bloodthirsty creatures, skinchangers, witches and things that we cannot comprehend, things that toy with humanity as a cat does with a trapped mouse. From the shadows these creatures have ruled the night and, for all time, hidden from mankind's sight and knowledge. Thus, virtually no one is aware of the torment to which we are subjected; to us, hardship is simply a fact of life, not the product of supernatural beings' machinations.

That's what hunters believed, too, before they were awoken to the truth. Once, your life was normal, at least by the standards you understood. You might have been married, had kids, a tedious job. You struggled with the day to day like everyone else, doing what you had to do to get by.

Then, without warning, someone or *something* opened your eyes. One minute, you were waiting for a train. The next, reality as you knew it collapsed all around you. A voice like your own — but not your own — might have announced to you, "THE SHADOWS LIVE." A destination sign might have changed from "Making all regular stops" to "YOU MUST MAKE THEM STOP." The smell of a vendor roasting peanuts might have transmuted into the stench of rotted flesh, blown on the stagnant tunnel wind.

It was only then that you recognized the *things* lurking in the corners of the station. People, but not human. Their skin was decayed. Ichor oozed from wounds on their bodies. Suddenly, it was clear that they stalked this place, awaiting lone travelers — victims. Abominations preyed upon innocent people! There was nothing to do but act. For the love of God, you had to stop them!

Nothing could ever be the same after that night. Now you can see the corrupt touch of monstrosities everywhere — at work, on the street, on the news, in church, in big business

in politics! The world you thought you knew was a trick, an illusion. Humans aren't in charge or at the top of the food chain. Unforgivable creatures are in control and humanity is their plaything.

Welcome to the World of Darkness.

Gothic-Punk

"Gothic-Punk" is perhaps the best way to describe the physical nature of the World of Darkness. The environment is a clashing mixture of styles and influences. The tension caused by the juxtaposition of ethnicities, social classes and subcultures makes the world a vibrant, albeit dangerous, place. All these aspects are ones familiar to normal people of the world. They've dealt with them all their lives. It's the existence of monsters and their part in the condition of things that is unknown — until now.

"Gothic" describes the ambiance of the World of Darkness. Buttressed buildings loom overhead, bedecked with Classical columns and leering gargoyles. Residents are dwarfed by the sheer scale of architecture, lost amid spires that seem to grope toward Heaven in an effort to escape the physical world. The ranks of the religious swell as mortals flock to any banner that offers them a hope of something better in the hereafter. Cults flourish in the underground, promising power and redemption. The institutions that control society are even more staid and conservative than they are in our world. Many in power prefer the evils of the world they know to the chaos engendered by change. It is a divisive world of have and have-not, rich and poor, excess and squalor.

"Punk" is the lifestyle that many denizens of the World of Darkness adopt. In order to give their lives meaning, they rebel, dashing themselves against the crags of power. Gangs prowl the streets and organized crime breeds in the underworld, all in reaction to the pointlessness of living "by the book." Music is louder, faster, more violent, or it's hypnotically monotonous, and supported by masses who find salvation in its escape. Speech is coarser, fashion is bolder, art is more shocking, and technology brings it all to everyone at the click of a button. The world is more corrupt, its people are spiritually bankrupt and escapism often replaces hope.

As if these conditions weren't fearful enough, the fortunate — or cursed — among humanity now understand the truth of their world: that monsters exist and control everything. These few people respond to the horror in their own ways, by their own means. Some seek salvation for mankind *and* its oppressors, as the revelations with which they're confronted surely mark the impending End. Others lash out in a desperate effort to reclaim a world they never had. Still others search for safe places where humanity might start again to forge a world of its own making, for these tortured souls understand that the decay and decline all around them may not be their fault after all, but an unjust punishment imposed by shadow-players.

Gothic-Punk is a mood and setting conveyed during the course of the game. The greatest share of creating this ambiance falls upon the Storyteller, but players should consider their characters' stake in it as well. The ambiance is also a matter of taste. Some troupes prefer more Gothic than Punk, whereas others may want equal amounts of both elements, or little of either. In the end, it's your game and you are free to make of it what you will. Simply bear in mind that experiencing the world is a shared endeavor, and everything the players and Storyteller do helps make that world more believable. Actions, settings, characters and descriptions all convey the Gothic-Punk aesthetic.

Cities

Hunters exist all over the world, in every country, whether the isolated or unaware among the imbued know it or not. Yet a preponderance of them live and carry out their self-chosen missions in cities. The reasons are fairly clear, given a few assumptions. Human populations are most concentrated in urban centers, rather than in the country or the wilds, where people are few and far between. Monsters feed on and control the masses, so it makes sense that monsters would dwell in cities, too, whether hiding in plain sight amid the throng or hiding in the dark places where no one dares go.

Although cities are assumed to be monsters' dens, there's some protection in conducting the hunt in these places. Hunters find safety in numbers, not only among other chosen, but among the populace as a whole. Hunters who are imbued together or who find each other in cities can share their abilities, pool their resources, watch one another's backs. They form teams that work together and play the same urban fields against the unknown. Meanwhile, monsters have preyed upon humanity for ages and, if the stories are true, some may be long-lived to say the least. Surely, one mortal starts to look like every other to these beings, much as cattle are indistinguishable at the slaughterhouse. Thus, hunters find anonymity among the urban defenseless, and may strike by surprise then disappear quickly.

All of which is not to say that no hunters venture outside cities into rural territory. Some, such as individuals who can no longer bear the truth of the world or who seek safety for themselves and their families, go abroad. However, there is really no safety to be found anywhere. Monsters exist in the country and wilds, too, and they may be more dangerous than any city-dwelling horror. These creatures have learned to survive in nature, where predator and prey is the dichotomy of life. A hunter in the wilds may still have his own powers and skills, but his opponent is a twisted force of nature. In such a setting a hunter has no one to turn to but himself. If such an isolated lifestyle can be survived, it quickly devolves to a furtive existence of hiding, foraging and hiding again, like a scavenging animal avoiding beasts of prey.

What Is a Hunter?

Storytelling and roleplaying games may feature many kinds of protagonists. In some games, players assume the roles of heroes in a fantasy setting or superheroes saving the world from villains' depredations. In **Hunter**, appropriately enough, players assume the personas of monster hunters — brave, determined people who confront the supernatural — and guide these characters through a world virtually identical to our own.

Hunters don't start out that way. They aren't born and raised with the awareness of monsters or the capacity to fight them. They begin as normal people who are one day confronted with how the world really is; they're exposed to the creatures that lurk in the shadows. Most people panic and run from such beings, or from the very idea that such things exist (why does science tell us there are no such things as monsters again?). Would-be hunters are different from the majority in that they possess whatever it takes to stand and face the unknown, and even have the bravery or temerity to act against it.

It seems that the *doing* is what in fact gives hunters full insight into reality, into how the world is not our own. Whereas those people who run from or turn a blind eye to the truth will not accept it and cannot know it, hunters, by staying, seeing and even fighting back, are exposed to the gamut of reality. They learn we are not alone, yet ironically, hunters themselves are alone with their knowledge. Instinctual fear of the truth keeps the masses mired in ignorance. The rest of humanity refuses to believe that the supernatural could exist, let alone take physical form, so hunters must keep their horrible awareness to themselves and seek to protect people from their own closed minds. Thus, hunters band together in small groups through which they can uncover, stalk and perhaps even destroy the enemy — or die trying.

The Spirit of the Game

Hunter: The Reckoning is one in a series of games set in the World of Darkness. Its predecessors are in fact about the monsters whom hunters stalk. Games including **Vampire: The Masquerade**, **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** and **Mage: The Ascension** allow you to play supernatural creatures in a modern age, fighting amongst themselves and each other, and controlling the mass of humanity. Obviously, **Hunter** is the ultimate response to those games, the chance to fight back against the monsters.

If **Hunter** is your first foray into the Storyteller series, you're in luck. You approach the game unaware of the creatures who stalk the World of Darkness, their cultures, their powers or their ways. You are the equivalent of your hunter character: wide-eyed and uninitiated. Your experience with **Hunter** as a game is comparable to your character's experience with existence as a hunter. Enjoy the experience and try to maintain your distance from the other Storyteller games. You have a unique take on **Hunter** that few others in your troupe are likely to possess.

If you've played other games set in the World of Darkness, **Hunter** demands something of a new approach. Your imbued character doesn't know anything about the *real* world into which he is suddenly thrust. Meanwhile, you could know a great deal. In the spirit of the game, it's your responsibility to forget everything you know, or at least to try to ignore it for each game session.

If you don't put your knowledge out of mind, **Hunter** really isn't any fun. The charm of the game is the fear and wonder of the unknown. Think back to your first roleplaying experiences, the curiosity and awe that came with exploring fantastic otherworlds. Well, here's your opportunity to rekindle that experience with the World of Darkness. You just have to be willing to do it. Otherwise, if you blurt out information your character could not know, or pursue leads that your hunter could not be aware of, you ruin the story for everyone involved.

So, what's the most important rule you need to know? *That you are certain of nothing*. If you can't remember that, don't be surprised if your Storyteller plays tricks on you and your character, to turn your knowledge against you and undo everything you take for granted about the World of Darkness.

Hunter also lends itself to another kind of gamer: You might have never played a Storyteller game before because all that angsty-goth or save-nature crap just turned you off. Well, here's an opportunity to do something about it. Hunters are normal people suddenly made aware of creatures and all their melodrama, and it's hunters' job to strike back! For the walking-dead poseur and the bleeding-heart, tree-hugging shambling rug there is now a shotgun blast and impressive powers with which to back it up. Here's your chance to attack the other Storytellers games in their very own setting. Here's your chance to kick some ass!

What This Isn't

Hunter: The Reckoning is *not* **Hunters Hunted**, **The Inquisition** or **Project Twilight** Second Edition (not, in other words, a revision of previous game supplements from White Wolf). This book is about a new breed of people who are human, but who rise above humanity and act in its name. This game is not about government agencies, people who operate with only guns and technology, or humans with insight into and familiarity with the supernatural. **Hunter: The Reckoning** is the cosmological answer to monsters' eternal crimes and abuses, a response that sounds on the last of the Final Nights and on the brink of Apocalypse. It's a chance for humanity as a whole to rise up and claim a world for itself.

The Imbuing

Hunters call their moment of realization the imbuing. Although hunters operate alone or in isolated groups, their efforts to find each other and spread the word make terms like "the imbuing" common parlance, and prove that being "chosen" is not an isolated experience.

Accounts of the imbuing vary wildly, but certain elements appear to occur for all hunters, regardless of age, sex, race or nationality. Hunters hear voices, see distorted messages on billboards or in newspapers, or perceive odd sounds, smells or visions. Regardless of its form, the experience always offers a warning of nearby danger: a booming "IT DOES NOT LIVE," a street sign that momentarily reads "RUN NOW," a sudden, hallucinatory image of people strewn about a street as Death walks among them.

No source seems to be apparent for these signs and portents, but their subject soon becomes clear. With eyes newly opened, the awakened hunter witnesses the most grotesque obscenity he has ever encountered — a thing not meant to exist, a walking affront to life itself, an abhorrent monstrosity. In that moment of clarity, a veneer erected to hide the real world fades forever. The secret is laid bare. The truth is revealed. There it stands in all its unholy glory: evil personified and presented for hideous edification. Monsters exist.

And that's only the beginning.

The Messengers

Among the hunters who seek out each other, whether for safety in numbers or simply for solace in a terrifying reality, the same questions are asked over and over: Why? Why me? Why now? Who has done this to me? Theories abound about why people are chosen. The end of the world is coming, Judgment Day is here. Monsters' ongoing evil has finally received its karmic response. Aliens have touched humanity and revealed the truth — or are responsible for monsters on Earth. Ultimately, no one knows for sure why people are suddenly awoken.

However, the apparent messages or hallucinations suffered at the moment of imbuing lead many to believe that someone or something bestows this blessing or inflicts this curse. How else could intelligible voices, legible messages and waking dreams happen to disparate people, yet be so similar for all?

For lack of a better theory, the Other emerges as the prevailing answer for now. In burgeoning hunter circles — groups that are imbued together, hunters who meet through word of mouth, through signs left for each other or through covert Internet communication — these beings are labeled "Messengers" or "Heralds." What their intended message is or for whom they convey it, if anyone, is unknown.

Certainly, the mystery of the Messengers makes them just as frightening as the monsters to which hunters are exposed. Yet, the imbued take comfort in the knowledge that they are still human (or so they believe), that they are not the walking corruption that so clearly oppresses mankind. For most hunters, that distinction is enough. Questioning further only makes an already harsh world inhospitable and existence itself intolerable.

Edges

Thus, hunters are exposed to reality and the monsters that inhabit it. The chosen are forced to recognize the depravity of creatures that are truly in control. But what evidence is there that the imbued have any responsibility for that knowledge? Why does that knowledge demand action?

For most of the imbued, the answer is simple: At the moment of rebirth, they are granted strange abilities and powers. At the instant they are witness to living nightmares, the chosen are empowered with the means to respond to the creatures before them. These amazing abilities seem to be numerous and varied. Some allow a person to strike down a creature. Others create chaos under cover of which the imbued may act. Some powers grant extraordinary perception, the ability to see and recognize monsters wherever they hide. Still others allow the imbued to heal themselves and others miraculously.

Why else would the imbued be granted these gifts than to react to the abominations revealed before them? Evil exists. The imbued have the power to stop it. That's what makes them hunters. As many hunters observe, "What else is there to know?"

The Hunt

Awareness of monsters and heinous corruption doesn't stop with the moment of the imbuing. A person's life is changed forever after the moment her eyes are opened. She sees creatures everywhere. Their influence touches and taints everything. The reason for all the suffering and strife in the world becomes clear. Friends' loss, families' turmoil, society's ills — they all trace back to monsters and their plots. How long can one witness these atrocities — deaths, disappearances, abuses, invasions — before lashing out against them?

Most of the chosen cannot remain quiet. They strive to protect loved ones, friends, neighborhoods and cities from the creatures that would control and destroy all these things. The result is the hunt: the ongoing pursuit of creatures to stop them, save them, understand them, outwit them or simply destroy them.

All hunters undertake their own missions against the unknown. They have their own reasons for stalking, preserving or killing. Ultimately, however, their objectives are the same, whether they realize it or not. The cautious hunter who devotes his life to protecting his family, and the daring hunter who travels wherever he must to locate and destroy both want the same thing: to start again, to make a new place where *people* can be safe, to inherit the world that they once believed their own. Whether such a

goal can ever be achieved is unknown. Many imbued do not even consider the direction of the hunt long enough to perceive its destination; they simply survive day to day, night to night. For others, claiming the world is the only goal of the hunt — and it must be achieved.

Hunters' Foes

Monsters, monsters everywhere. Hunters' enemies are, collectively, an enigma. *Before*, their existence was nothing but folklore and fairy tales. Now, all the old stories are proved true — more than true, even: reality. It's the "real" world that's make-believe. People's lives, dreams and fates have never been their own, but are, and always have been, the creations of obscene, invisible forces.

Although they are roused to the truth, the chosen are still very much in the dark. They have a glimmer of what's really out there, but they still can't see far. Whatever they don't know they're forced to guess. Investigation and extrapolation are the order of the day — and night. If creatures exist and prey upon humanity, others could be out there that have yet to be encountered. After all, who or what created the ones already faced?

Left with ominous uncertainties and glaring ignorance, hunters turn to whatever sources they can for information on the enemy. Suddenly, old legends, folk stories and fairy tales are fonts of wisdom. Can the walking dead show their faces in daylight? Are shapechangers mortally afraid of silver? Is the Church — or another religious institution — any protection, or is it as corrupt as the rest of the world? Is a restless spirit forced to haunt only one place?

There are limitless questions, and hunters don't know any answers for sure. They don't even know whether different monsters exist or if they're all the same kind, each with a different face. Are the old stories true? Can they be turned to, trusted? Are they fiction or fact? Hunters' lives hang in the balance.

Human Relations

Being imbued and undertaking the hunt make a person an outsider among normal, unaware people. You know and have seen things that most cannot or will not imagine. Your previous day-to-day life seems meaningless now; monsters are real and must be dealt with. Yet, that very mundane, oblivious existence is exactly what your friends, family and coworkers still live. They can't understand the pressures and fears that you face. They don't understand why you can't make dates and deadlines, why you can't remember promises or anniversaries, or even why you can't manage to turn up for work at all. Most hunters' old lives fall apart.

So, why not preach from the mound, tell everyone the truth and open all eyes to the creatures that plague the world? Because other people can't understand you: They can't see what you can. Monsters' secrecy, control and manipulation is so thorough that the average human mind cannot encompass the full scope of reality. Unless the common person is shaken by some unseen hand, as you were, she can never stir from her slumber.

Thus, relations with family, friends and even perfect strangers can never be the same for hunters. Normal folk simply cannot sympathize with your ordeal. Old acquaintances may grow distant, disturbed, confused and even threatening. Lovers may leave you, bosses may fire you, police may pursue you and bankers may foreclose on your property.

Hunters learn quickly, then, that normal people have to be left in the dark. Attempts to reveal the truth only baffle them and make you seem addled, strange or insane. They don't understand why you need to empty the family bank account. They don't understand why you need to fly to Mexico without warning. They don't understand why you lashed out at that woman in Accounting, the one chummy with the president. The defenseless don't understand you and may even seek to have you committed or arrested.

And there's another, more insidious danger to preaching to the masses. Monsters are everywhere, they have feelers and sensors at all levels of society, government and religion. Where monsters themselves cannot tread, they manipulate pawns who act as their eyes and ears — normal people in league with evil, people whom you may not recognize as the enemy. The police could be under the sway of the walking dead. Politicians may be possessed by spirits. Television stations may broadcast the prepared statements of mind-controlling demons.

If you make one peep about monsters, their existence or their influence, the creatures might hear. Now your anonymity is gone, and they know you. They realize that you can see them. You're a threat that must be silenced, and any confrontation will be on their terms, not yours. By trying to warn the populace, you may be signing your own death warrant. And though you may be able to dodge the enemies lethal reprisals, what about your family or loved ones?

So, it might seem that hunters are absolutely alone against their foes. Not so. They have each other. The imbued can turn to one another for comfort, stability, foundation and sympathy. Hunters know what their fellows have witnessed and gone through, what they perceive and can do. The result, typically, is small circles of hunters — often ones imbued at the same horrifying scene — who work together. Personality and motivational differences may threaten to break them apart. ("Should all monsters be destroyed, or were some once human and worthy of saving?") But, regardless of clashes, hunters recognize that they need each other to survive, whether that need unites a handful of imbued in a neighborhood or hunters scattered across the world who seek out each other through the Internet.

Hunter Code

The imbuing holds myriad mysteries, all of them strange and frightening. Perhaps one of the most peculiar hunter "gifts" is an apparent language of symbols that's imparted when people are *touched*. These icons appear to be intuitively understood by hunters, and can be written and read as if you knew them all your life, despite never having put them to paper or seen them before. Many hunters call this language "the Word."

Each of these symbols seems to have a simple meaning; all convey some short message, as pictograms do. One icon could indicate that a building is a safe haven in which to hide. Another could warn that a bloodsucker controls the area. Or one could symbolize that a neighborhood is under the protection of one or more hunters, and that anyone who can read the message should seek them out.

So far, no formal documentation or catalog has been made of these images, yet hunters know them implicitly and can impart a written message with one, or as many as three, when needed. The symbols appear most commonly as urban graffiti, usually as directions, warnings or signals to fellow hunters. Most hunters agree that they first use these images early on in their self-understanding and missions, in an effort to find others of their kind. However, the icons remain invaluable for identifying dangerous turf and recognizing the hunting grounds of known monsters and the chosen.

So far, the enemy does not seem to understand or even perceive the significance of these symbols. Nor do human pawns or authorities. But should the code ever be compromised, hunters are sure to be made sorely vulnerable.

Hunter code is explained fully on p. 282.

Lexicon

Hunters know and understand very little about themselves, their new world and their role in it, about the reasons they are awoken and empowered, or about the creatures they face. And yet, here is a terrifying reality in which they clearly exist, and here are shocking powers that they can obviously bring to bear. So, how to come to terms with these apparent facts, when so many questions go unanswered? Hunters are forced to theorize about their existence, to discuss, to dispute, to guess. The result of such dialogue, at least among the imbued who have met at all, is a collection of terms that try to give meaning to the vast unknown.

These names and labels have been coined on the clandestine hunter-net e-mail list to facilitate communication, so that other hunters can understand what is discussed — a monster, a power, or the forces that create hunters — when so many different names or descriptors can be (and are) applied.

Imbued who remain in isolation or who fail to learn that they are not alone do not know these terms; they probably have their own. Only introduction into any kind of fledgling hunter society imparts this terminology, and various hunter groups certainly use a variety of other words.

Avenger: A hunter perceived to advocate, above all else, the extermination of the supernatural (see creed).

bait: A hunter who uses himself as a lure to provoke confrontations with monsters.

burden, the: Humanity; particularly, people who would rather preserve society's evils than risk change for something better.

bystander: A person present at an imbuing who perceives the supernatural but lacks the will to act against it. Like hunters, these people recall seeing monsters thereafter, but they lack edges or powers of their own.

creed: Rudimentary hunter groups theorize that the imbued have certain philosophies and approaches to the hunt that might be codified, each as a separate creed.

chosen, the: A term some hunters apply to themselves in regard to the Heralds (see imbued).

Defender: A hunter who seems to strive to protect certain people, places or things as much as he is driven to eliminate monsters (see creed).

defenseless, the: Normal humans who have no idea of the truth about the world or monsters. A similar, less complimentary term is "the blind."

edge: Often plural; any of the fantastic and mysterious powers of the imbued. Also called "the stuff" and "juice."

gawker: Often plural; a normal person who witnesses hunters' edges or creatures' supernatural effects in use, yet cannot comprehend them.

gone fishing: A label applied to hunters who abandon the city in hopes of finding peace in the wilderness or countryside and away from monsters.

Heralds: A name assigned to mysterious and presumably plural beings believed to have empowered hunters through the imbuing (see Messengers). In this case, the being or beings are usually considered the agents of a greater power, often God.

hunt, the: Hunter lifestyle in a nutshell; the pursuit, trailing, studying and, ultimately, confronting of supernatural creatures and the unknown. Also called "the mission."

imbued, the: Hunters. People made to recognize the world the way it really is, and the monsters that inhabit it. Such people receive inscrutable powers, presumably with which to oppose monsters.

Innocent: A member of a loose group of hunters believed to have an open-minded, unjaded approach to the mission (see creed).

Judge: A hunter believed to have a discerning sense for how to carry out the mission and to achieve the greatest good, at least by his own standards (see creed).

lurker: A hunter who frequents the Internet and researches the supernatural, but avoids getting directly involved in the hunt. Also called a "wannabe" or "bystander" in a derogatory manner.

Martyr: A hunter — part of a seemingly like-minded group — who is willing to offer herself up in the name of the cause (see creed).

Messengers: A title assigned to forces believed to be responsible for hunters' imbuing. Hunters of various cultures and backgrounds have different takes on who or what the Messengers are, but they are widely held as forces for good (or at least not outright evil).

monster: A generality applied to all inhuman, unnatural creatures that exist in the world and prey upon humanity. Numerous terms allude to the perceived varieties of monsters: rots, invisibles, bloodsuckers, skinchangers, ghosts, spirits, vampires, werewolves, zombies, the walking dead, man-beasts, witches, warlocks. Also collectively called "the enemy."

Most Dangerous Game (MDG): The hunt itself. Also, the enemy; intelligent creatures capable of fighting back with weapons of their own, as opposed to relatively defenseless animals.

puppet: A human pawn of the supernatural, whether willing or unwitting. Also called "traitor."

pylon: A normal human at the scene of hunter or monster activity when edges or supernatural effects are displayed (see gawkers). Also applied to normal people present at the moment of imbuing who do not recognize or respond to any monstrous presence. An uncomplimentary term.

Redeemer: One of a loosely recognized type of hunter who, for his own reasons, seeks out worth and value among monsters rather than destroying them outright (see creed).

second sight: The ability to perceive monsters — at least ones that attempt to hide or disguise themselves — through force of will. Also called "the sight."

soulless, the: Humans who venerate the supernatural or support its cause through "questionable behavior" (e.g., nightclub goers, new agers, goths, gang members). A highly subjective term applied according to the user's own moral code and belief systems. Ironically, some hunters can be "soulless" to other hunters.

touched: To be affected or influenced by the Messengers (see imbued), whether referring to another hunter or a bystander.

Visionary: A hunter who demonstrates a philosophical attitude toward the hunt and assumes few preconceived notions about the Heralds, monsters or the goals of the chosen (see creed).

wacko: A hunter who pursues the mission to extremes, whether through willingness to make profound sacrifices, to accept human losses, or to profess unfathomable motives in the name of the hunt.

Word, the: Hunters' implicit language of signs and icons used to communicate simple encoded messages.

yokel: A hunter who believes in and professes the wisdom of supernatural folktales and legends concerning monsters, often without having tested the validity of such beliefs.

How to Use This Book

This book is divided into several chapters, each of which is designed to explore and explain a specific area of the game. Remember, though, that in a storytelling game the most important "chapter" is your imagination. Never let anything in this book be a substitute for your own creativity.

Chapter 1: The Here and Now (The Hunter Condition) explores the existence of the imbued, what it's like to learn that the world is a lie and that monsters are real.

Chapter 2: A World of Darkness (Setting) is a hunter account of the world as it really is, and the dangers that await everywhere, from your hometown to far-flung lands.

Chapter 3: The Hunter's Creed (Character Types) details the seven types of hunters who stalk the shadows and seek out the unknown.

Chapter 4: I Have Heard the Message (Creation & Traits) provides rules for creating your hunter character, plus all the qualities and ratings he has.

Chapter 5: The Hunter's Edge (Powers) offers rules for the freakish abilities apparently granted by the Messengers.

Chapter 6: Laws of the Hunt (Rules) provides the basic means of resolving characters' various actions.

Chapter 7: Tools of the Hunt (Systems) describes a plethora of ways to simulate everything from gentle seduction to brutal combat.

Chapter 8: The Truth (Storytelling) tells Storytellers how to build entertaining stories in which to involve the characters.

Chapter 9: The Enemy (Antagonists) offers some insights and reveals the greater unknown about monsters, hunters' foes.

Finally, the **Appendices** provide addenda and some nascent hunter societies that form... and collapse.

Live-Action

Most **Hunter** games take place around a tabletop, and the players describe what their characters say and do. However, games can also be conducted through live-action play. This exciting form of gaming bears similarities to improvisational theater, in that players actually dress as their characters and act out their characters' scenes as though they were actors in a play. Thus, rather than saying, "My character walks over to the table and picks up the ancient document," you, the player, actually get up, walk over to a properly decorated table and pick up the "ancient document" (probably a prop created by the Storyteller — for example, a piece of parchment that's been scorched around the edges and "aged," with a coating of flour "dust").

A Storyteller still guides the action and directs the plot; the Storyteller describes special features of the setting, oversees challenges the characters undergo, and may interrupt the action at any time.

Live-action roleplaying does not typically use dice; alternate systems, such as those presented in White Wolf's **Mind's Eye Theatre** line of products, take the place of dice when determining the results of challenges. Most situations are resolved simply through acting and the Storyteller's decisions.

Safeguards

Some rules are necessary to ensure that live-action is safe and enjoyable for all participants and onlookers. Unlike any other rules in this book, these rules *must* be followed.

- **No Touching:** Period. All combat and physical interaction must be handled through dice or other abstract systems. Players must never strike, grapple or otherwise touch anyone during the game. It is the Storyteller's responsibility to call a time-out if one or more players get overly rambunctious.
- **No Weapons:** Props such as hats, period dress and canes are great in a live-action game. Weapons aren't. Period. No knives, no swords and nothing that even remotely resembles a firearm. Don't even bring fake swords, squirt guns, or foam-rubber weapons. If your character must carry a "weapon," take an index card and write "gun" or "sword" or whatever on it; during combat challenges, present the card to the Storyteller, who adjudicates its use in play.
- **Play in a Designated Area:** Live-action is meant to be played in the home or other predetermined spot. Don't involve onlookers in the game, and make sure everyone in the area, or anyone passing through the area, understands exactly what you're doing. A game can look disturbing, even frightening, to people who aren't aware of what's going on. Don't try to shock or intimidate passersby; such behavior is not only immature, it could lead to well-deserved prosecution.
- **Know When to Stop:** If the Storyteller calls for a time-out or other break in the action, stop immediately. The Storyteller remains the final arbiter of all events in the game. Likewise, when the game session ends, put away your costume and call it a night.
- **It's Only a Game:** Live-action is for having fun. If a rival wins, if a character dies, if a plan goes awry, it's not the

end of the world. Sometimes, players like to get together outside the game and talk about it — say, a troupe that forms a novice hunter group gathers to decide who or what they need to protect or pursue most — and there's nothing wrong with that. But telephoning your Martyr ally at four in the morning to ask her to join you on a personal mission is taking things too far. Remember, everyone's doing this to have fun!

The Bottom Line: Live-action can be one of the richest and most satisfying storytelling experiences, if handled maturely and responsibly. We're not kidding about that "maturely and responsibly," folks. In live-action, you make the game, so it is imperative that you treat yourself and others with utmost care, dignity and respect. This game is emphatically *not* about "real" stalking or fighting, nor does it entail erotic or supernatural activities. You are not a monster hunter, you just play one in the game.

Source Material

There's a host of inspirational material out there that relates to **Hunter**. Some of it portrays the actual pursuit and hunting of creatures, mundane or supernatural, and reveals the lengths to which predator and prey go to survive. Other references depict World of Darkness "denizens" in different ways, thus allowing you to capture some of that same flavor in your character or game.

Recommended literature includes: *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker, particularly for Van Helsing's pursuit of the infamous vampire; *Night Force*, a group of now-dated but still insightful monster hunters from DC Comics; *Inhuman Beings* by Jerry Jay Carroll, with its one-man war against mysterious creatures; *In the Palm of Darkness* by Mayra Montero, for its treatment of (Caribbean) zombies; *Tomb of Dracula*, from Marvel Comics (you know what's coming under movies); virtually any Sherlock Holmes story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Holmes would have been the foremost monster hunter of his time); anything with pulp-era characters such as the Shadow, Doc

Savage, the Avenger or the Spider (though campy, these fellas battle their share of abominations).

Movies and TV. The list is endless. It includes pretty much any horror flick that requires a weak, uninitiated protagonist to contend with the unknown. Then again, there are some pretty silly ones, with way-out-there heroes, but they can still fit the bill. *The Night Stalker*; *Lost Boys*; *Fright Night*; John Carpenter's *Vampires*; *Blade Runner*; *Blade*; *Vampire Hunter D*; *Kindred: The Embraced* (Hey, why not?); *They Live*; *Night of the Living Dead* (the first and no others); *Evil Dead/ Army of Darkness*; *The Silence of the Lambs*; *The X-Files*; *From Dusk Till Dawn*; and let's not forget *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in any incarnation. *The Equalizer*, although not horror, regularly examined the emotional cost to its hero, given his superior talent for killing bad people. For a great portrayal of an everyman in the grip of an inexplicable obsession, see the original *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (as opposed to the *Special Edition*).

And for ideas to keep your **Hunter** game as realistic, humbling and harsh as possible, watch *Deliverance*.

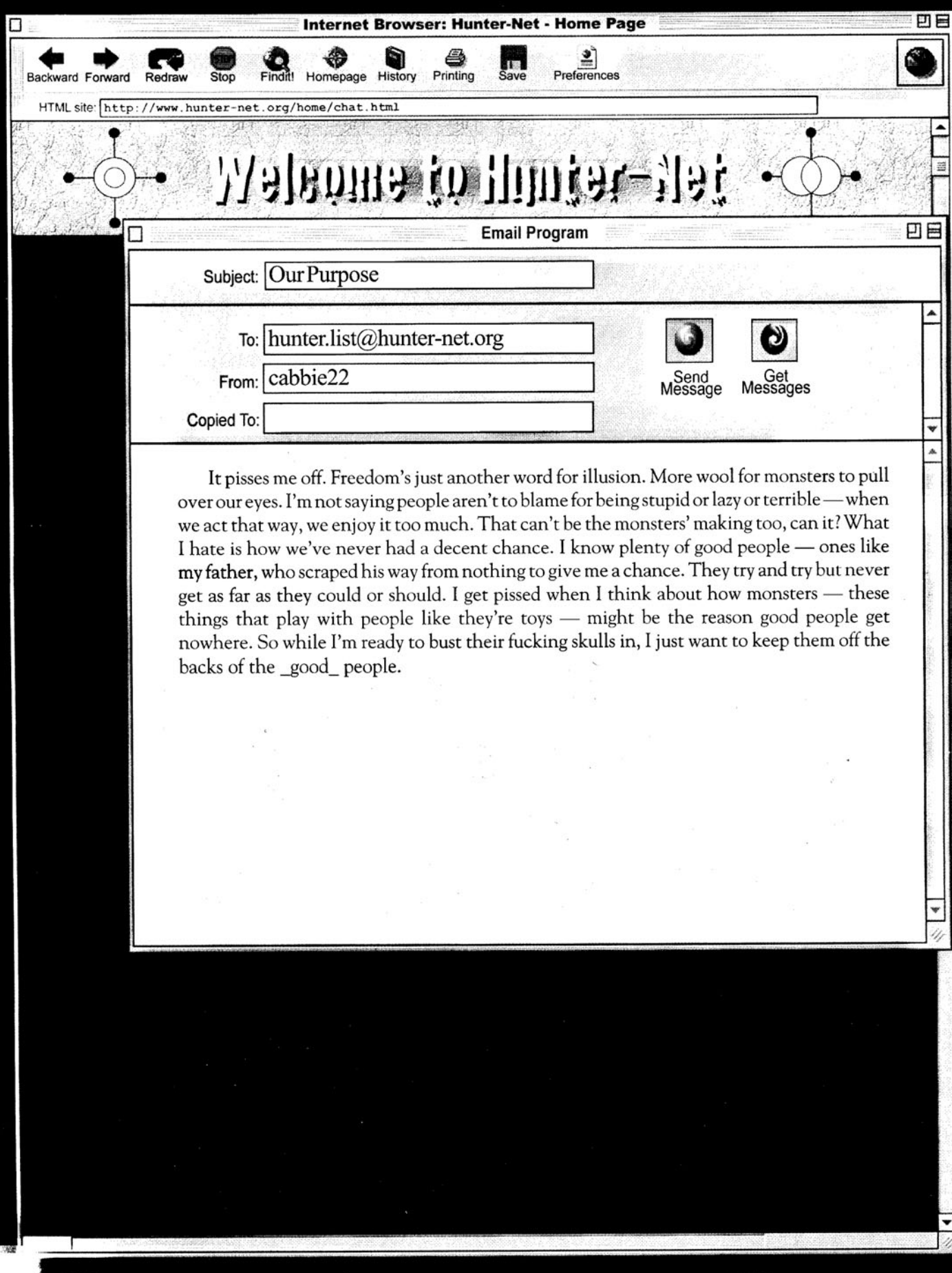
Developers' Foreword

In other White Wolf rulebooks, a developer's statement usually comes at the very end, where he explains all the trials and tribulations suffered to make his vision a reality. We're changing that approach because we have something different to say.

From its inception, **Hunter: The Reckoning** has been created as a storytelling game about real people. When we say "real people," we don't mean ex-Navy Seals, hired assassins, one-time vampire ghouls, government agents, pro wrestlers or jungle explorers. When we say "real people," we mean steelworkers, doctors, parents, students, garbage collectors and brick layers — you and me, and the ordinary people we know.

Hunter is not about superheroic exploits and guns, guns, guns. Sure, it *can* be, but that's not the point. This game is about the horror of living a mundane, everyday, blue-collar life and suddenly being confronted with a terrifying, wretched reality: Monsters exist. We are their playthings. Whereas Sgt. Rex Hazzard might bristle with firearms in response to that truth, everyman John Smith must face the same creatures with only his wits, his will and whatever courage he can muster. Hazzard's story is stupid and boring. That guy isn't even like us; his life is two dimensional. Smith's story, though, is plausible, traumatic and intriguing. We can identify with him and play him realistically in a world gone utterly wrong.

So when you read this book and play this game, please consider the kinds of characters and stories for which it was created. Yeah, you can play an ex-Navy Seal ass-kicker, but you'd be missing the point. Ask yourself what it would be like to be a simple temp or dock worker, instead. Your **Hunter** stories will be all the more entertaining for it.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It pisses me off. Freedom's just another word for illusion. More wool for monsters to pull over our eyes. I'm not saying people aren't to blame for being stupid or lazy or terrible — when we act that way, we enjoy it too much. That can't be the monsters' making too, can it? What I hate is how we've never had a decent chance. I know plenty of good people — ones like my father, who scraped his way from nothing to give me a chance. They try and try but never get as far as they could or should. I get pissed when I think about how monsters — these things that play with people like they're toys — might be the reason good people get nowhere. So while I'm ready to bust their fucking skulls in, I just want to keep them off the backs of the _good_ people.

CHAPTER 1: THE HERE AND NOW (THE HUNTER CONDITION)

Be thou prepared, and prepare for thyself, thou, and all thy company that are assembled unto thee, and be thou a guard unto them.
— Ezekiel 38:7

From the Journal of Dr. Carleton VanWyk

October 2, 1999

A singular occurrence today, even by the peculiar standards of my investigations. I have had a different sort of revelation, I suppose, though I hesitate to use such religiously charged terminology.

I was pursuing #11, my current subject. It drove to a drugstore and I waited outside, confident that it would return to its vehicle. In the past, #11 has been frustratingly able to elude me when it perceived pursuit, and I was determined to stay as far back from it as I could. However, when I heard a commotion inside the store, I approached cautiously.

#11 nearly ran into me as it came out the door. Inside, people were screaming, but several were pursuing it. (I later learned their names: Jared, "Leaf" and "Oaken.")

It is important for me to capture my perceptions now, while they're still fresh in my mind. I saw #11, just as I have previously seen it: as a walking corpse, with sagging pallid skin and mealy rot in its eye sockets. What soon became apparent was that, at last, I was not the only person making this perception.

The creature before me resembled nothing so much as some complicated optical illusion: On one level, I could make out the semblance I normally beheld — a pale young man with a ponytail and a dour expression. However, at the same time, I saw the decaying flesh punctuated with rotted gaps that appeared to me with only a minor exertion. There was no flickering, no overlap — not like a double exposed photograph.

Confronting #11 in such unplanned circumstances made me blurt out the question that had haunted me for so long: "What are you?"

#11's reply was an unpoetic "Fuck you!" and an attempt to claw my face with its hideous nails. I recoiled, drew my pistol and fired.

Then I saw the truly extraordinary thing. A slender black man (Jared) who appeared to be holding a large, red-hot metal bar in both hands lunged through the doorway and struck #11 from behind. A plump woman ("Leaf") and her ruddy companion ("Oaken") followed him closely.

True to form, #11 barely acknowledged the bullet wound or the blow from the glowing bar. Then it made a strange, almost flamboyant gesture. As it did so, a peculiar, sourceless blackness seemed to flow around it like a fog of ink. Surrounded by this shadow, it raced toward its car. I fired at it again and hit, as Jared shouted, "Where'd it go?"

"Don't you see it? The El Camino, that's its car!"

The creature was trying to pull its keys from its pocket. Jared, slashing wildly with the bar, moved toward it. I drew a

bead when Oaken yelled, "Don't shoot!" and put his hand on my arm. At the time, I assumed he was worried about me hitting Jared. #11 got its car door open and, seeing that, Jared struck at it again — a glancing blow off the creature that nonetheless shattered the car's window. #11 gave Jared a tremendous shove backward and slammed the door shut. I fired again and missed.

"What is that thing?" the woman demanded.

"No time to explain," I shouted, sprinting to my own car and continuing to fire at #11. I did not hit it.

I could hear sirens in the distance as I got to my car. I was fumbling the keys into the ignition when I heard a knock on my window. Jared looked in at me with wide eyes.

"You know what that thing is?" he shouted. I nodded.

"Then I'm coming with you," he declared. With only a moment to decide, I hit the electric lock on my car. He leapt into the back seat and we rolled off in pursuit, leaving Leaf and Oaken behind. Unfortunately, #11 proved to be elusive yet again. I drove by its residence but its car was not to be found.

Our trip gave Jared and myself an opportunity to make our introductions, once we had calmed down somewhat from the excitement of immediate danger. Jared informed me that he's a bartender. Not wanting to go into the tedious truth, I told him I was a consulting physician. We exchanged phone numbers and then he asked me, point blank, "What the fuck was that rotting thing?"

I explained that #11 appeared to conform in some ways to the behaviors and abilities of a mythical "zombie" or "ghost." He was quiet for a moment, then said that if he hadn't seen it, he wouldn't have believed it. I concurred completely.

Once there was no immediate peril, Jared seemed to rethink his previous rash courage. He asked if "the thing" was going to come back to its house. I explained that it seemed to have some attachment to the building and often stayed there overnight when injured. I added that it did not appear to need sleep and told him of pursuing it once for 72 hours uninterrupted (the time it drove to Indiana and killed those two teenagers). He asked how it had vanished in the parking lot and how I had been able to see it. I said I didn't know.

I must confess that at that point I was hoping I had met another delver into the occult. I have long feared I was the only one. I hypothesized that my pursuit of non-normal creatures had allowed me to develop an immunity to their peculiar abilities. If Jared was a similar researcher, that would explain his immunity as well, but it was not so.

His story was this: He was in the drugstore to get a pack of cigarettes (he asked to smoke in my car and complained when I said no). Suddenly he heard a voice "like from nowhere" saying, "It does not live." He looked and realized that the man behind him in the cashier line was a walking corpse. Apparently no one else in the store saw the thing, except for "those two fat hippies." Everyone else fled when the "fight" broke out.

The woman, who was behind #11, asked it if it was all right (apparently thinking it was injured). It shoved her away and the man with her interposed himself between it and the woman. Jared had seen enough. Since #11 had turned its back to him to assault the woman, Jared attempted to seize it. It broke his grip and fled, running into me in the doorway. I asked him about the glowing metal bar. Jared had no idea where it came from. He said it felt hot, but did not burn. It "just appeared."

Jared was increasingly impatient: He did not want to get out of my car to smoke, but he seemed unwilling to wait quietly. Eventually, he suggested going back to the drugstore. At that point, I was quite happy to part company, so I agreed.

The police were still at the drugstore taking statements. Jared's eyes narrowed when he saw them. He suggested I drop him at the corner. When he saw that I intended to re-enter the store, he said, "Just be cool. Act like you're just getting some smokes or something." In another mood I might have been amused by him presuming to tell me how to evade unwanted police attention. At that point I was just annoyed.

I was inside the drugstore before I saw that the "two fat hippies" were still there. The woman was saying something to an officer about "a badly injured man who became violent when approached." The man had buttonholed one of the officers and was quietly explaining that his wife had been under a great deal of strain. I was trying to hear what was going on, but at that point a policeman stepped in front of me, rolled his eyes and asked, "Okay, so what's your story? Violent robbery with lots of gunshots but nobody hurt, or the walking dead and black dudes with flaming swords?"

I gave him a nonplused look and said, "Actually, I just came to get a new *TV Guide*. My cat threw up on my old one."

He laughed and shook his head. Looking past him, I saw the hippie man looking right at me. He nodded, and I nodded subtly back.

Ducking into the magazine aisle, I looked around. Seeing no one, I pulled a bill from my wallet and wrote my phone number on it. I paid for the *TV Guide* and paused to tie my shoe as the police departed. The woman was still trying to explain to them what she'd seen, and their attempts to placate her were becoming increasingly brief and obviously feigned. She followed them to the parking lot, her husband trailing behind. As the police drove away, I approached them and held out the bill.

"I think you dropped this," I said.

The woman gave me a hard look with squinted eyes. The man's glance was more open and steady, and he took the money.

"I'm Dr. Van Wyk," I said.

"I'm Oaken," he said. "This is Leaf."

They left. I drove past #11's home. Still no car. I waited three hours, my mind preoccupied and perplexed. I have reached only two tentative conclusions: Perhaps I now see the world as my quarry does, and perhaps I am no longer alone.

The Truth About "The Imbued"

My friends, we are part of the most evil, criminal conspiracy in the history of mankind. We are the few remaining tools of an evil regime, and members of its broken leadership are using us to protect themselves and increase their power.

In 1950, the CIA started Project BLUEBIRD, a research project to asses the use of drugs and hypnosis for mind control. In 1952, BLUEBIRD was replaced by ARTICHOKE, and in 1953 it reached its final form as MK-ULTRA. By *most* accounts, the CIA never "perfected" mind control — they just learned a great deal about altering people's perceptions and memories.

In 1954, James Jesus Angleton became the director of counterintelligence for the CIA. He served in that position for 20 years, and for the great bulk of his tenure he believed that the CIA had been severely compromised by the KGB. Several Soviet defectors supported his suspicions about a mole known only as "Sasha" — a KGB agent who worked *in the CIA — and who had at* least *as much authority as Angleton himself!*

At the same time, the KGB was busy investigating incidents of extrasensory perception, telekinesis and similar "psychic" abilities. Several sources indicate that the USSR had the cooperation of Red China — and through that cooperation, access to the largest population base on planet Earth. Even if psychic ability is rare in nature, even if it only happens once in a million births, then China had a potential of 2000 natural psychics for this research to find.

Now, I didn't use to believe in mind reading and telekinesis and all that jazz, but then again, I'd never seen a walking "corpse" either. The literature on psychic abilities is full of things that sound familiar to us, though: setting things on fire or destroying them without touching them; changing another person's behavior simply through an effort of will; getting glimpses of the future, or the past, or distant places.

Seeing what we've seen, is it so hard to believe we're psychic? I don't think so. What *is* hard to believe is that a number of psychics would all *simultaneously* have their abilities kick in — and only in the presence of some kind of "monster." That staggers all probability.

What's more likely is that we were all pushed to be psychic — maybe with drugs, or training or surgery — and probably as children or young adults. After all, the oldest known imbued person is, what, 50 or 60? Meaning they'd have been 10 years old when these projects were just getting started. A mind still young and malleable, waiting to be improved — and indoctrinated.

For that, I believe, is what happened to us. We were made psychic, and we were brainwashed to ignore our powers. Released into "normal" society, we were a legion of sleeper agents, waiting for the proper commands to start using our abilities on behalf of our masters.

The problem (from their point of view) was: how to ensure loyalty and obedience? Even MK-ULTRA never completely succeeded. They never broke free will. They could confound our perceptions and make us see whatever they wanted, but they couldn't control our choices.

But really, it's not much of a challenge to manipulate someone if you can control what they see. Want your psychic sleeper soldier to carry out a "hit" on a prominent businessman with CIA ties? Simple: Just change perception. *Just make the businessman look like a monster.* Your psychic soldier, overcome with revulsion and fear, lashes out — and even if he's killed or captured, there's no trail that leads back to his *real* masters.

Now that the USSR has collapsed, you've no doubt heard people fretting about nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorist nations. But imagine you're Ivan of the KGB, and you've got the control codes for a cadre of American sleeper agents — citizens of the USA, unaware of their true nature, and *armed with terrible psychic powers.* What are you going to do with them? Sell them to the highest bidder? Get revenge on the nation that destroyed your "Communist Utopia"? Use them to protect and enrich yourself? The mind boggles — but *this*, my friends, is the truth behind the "Messengers" and the "creatures" we're supposed to hunt.

October 7, 1999

I have not had time to write — barely time to think — but now my convalescence forces me to rest and gives me opportunity for introspection.

Meeting Jared and the other two has simultaneously reassured and troubled me. I was never disposed previously to the explanation that I had gone mad. Ironically, only now do I find myself considering the possibility that I am caught up in some mass hysteria.

Ultimately, however, I feel as I always have, that my senses are to be trusted. In the few brief days since the drugstore encounter, I have spotted two more extranormal subjects — human-shaped beings that do not seem to be visible or tangible to ordinary people. I have started notebooks #12 and #13 accordingly.

Perhaps more important, Jared contacted me. Initially he suspected that his sanity had failed (certainly a reasonable suspicion), and he called me to reassure himself that what he'd seen had occurred. I described for him the events at the drugstore after we'd parted — including the policeman's questioning me — to assure him that it had. He told me that since then, he'd felt jumpy, restless — and he assured me that while he was usually "chill," he constantly found his thoughts returning to subject #11 and its house. He suggested that we take a look.

Looking back, I find this curious. To be frank, Jared struck me as the last type who would get involved in some kind of crusade for knowledge or "the good of humanity." He's your standard, unmotivated, apathetic, woolly-thinking drudge. Admittedly, seeing #11 in all its rotted splendor could tend to shake a man out of his rut, but a more "reasonable" explanation — error, hoax, drug flashback, delirium tremens? — would surely hold greater appeal to someone who has a stake in things being the way they appear. Yet Jared doesn't cower back into delusion. He has chosen the ugly truth over the comforting lie. Perhaps there's more to him than there appears — but if not, where did he gain this curiosity and drive?

I picked Jared up at his home — an unkempt apartment complex frequently mentioned in the newspaper's crime calendar. It wasn't far from #11's lair. When we arrived, we saw #11's vehicle in the carport. Jared immediately unlocked his door and started to get out. It was only then that I smelled whiskey on his breath.

"What are you doing?" I asked. He turned to me. His eyes were wide and bright. "I'm going to kick some ass," he said, his voice thick but distinct. I told him not to be foolish — that we must approach carefully. He smirked and when he spoke again his voice was slurred — whether from drink or from habitual bad diction, I couldn't tell.

"All right, here's what we do: I'll go ring the bell, then run around the side of the house. You stay way back here and watch the door through your fuckin' binoculars. Then I'll come back here and check with you. If the thing's there, we can sneak in and jump it. If it ain't, we can sneak in and wait for it."

"Jared, I've watched it for some time. What makes you think we can survive a direct confrontation?"

"Shit, if *you* can survive, *I* fuckin' can, and if both of us do, that means *we* can. Besides, you heard that cop. I'm the nigger with the flaming sword."

He did not wait to hear my arguments, but set off for the door. I resigned myself to doing as he asked. As it happened, no one answered the door by the time he came back — he must have circled the block. I didn't see him because I was watching for #11.

"The locks are new, but there's a broken screen in back. We can get in."

I pointed out that if it was on foot, it was likely to return soon. With perfect pretzel logic, Jared decided that was all the more reason to move quickly. Unwilling to let this novice face #11 alone, I was unwillingly drawn into the creature's lair.

With a skill and confidence that might have disturbed me in other circumstances, Jared got us into the house. He staked out the front door while I watched the back, pistol in hand. At Jared's suggestion, I had also armed myself with a plank as a makeshift club.

Such timber scraps were scattered about the yard. The house looked practically abandoned. I had hoped to examine the creature's domain at length, but not to the extent that I was willing to endanger our ambush.

I had thought I was well hidden in the shadows of the hallway, carefully aiming at the back door, but #11 spotted me somehow, even through the back door's dingy window. It immediately ducked its head and bolted toward the side of the house. I shouted a warning to Jared, who ran toward me. I motioned him back, but he didn't know how fast #11 could move. There was a crash as it leapt through the window and seized him. Jared was on the floor, his brown face darkening as #11's fingers closed around his neck. I stepped up and put my gun to #11's head, but its hand swept up with such speed and violence that the gun flew from my broken fingers. I screamed, but to strike me, the creature had necessarily released Jared. The glowing brand appeared in his hands — and though I was there this time, I cannot clearly narrate its formation. He drove it into #11's belly.

The creature leapt back, its shirt smoldering from the heat of Jared's mysterious weapon — but for all that, apparently unfazed by its injuries. Jared swung at it fiercely. It dodged with preternatural speed, following up with a savage blow to Jared's jaw. He dropped, stunned, but by then I had seized my pistol and fired at the creature as best I could left-handed. I do not know if I struck it or not. It closed in on me, its hands balled into a double fist, and with one blow knocked me off my feet. I vividly recall a distinct pop as my mandible separated from my temporal bone.

"Who are you? Why are you tormenting me?" #11 demanded (a question which, in retrospect, strikes me as extremely ironic given our respective positions at the time). I just smiled, because I could see Jared stumbling to his feet behind the creature. To cover the sounds of Jared's approach, I laughed. That is, I started laughing, but ended screaming as the pain from my dislocated jaw became intense. My mirth was real, however: Seeing the fury and consternation on #11's face, and seeing Jared raise the blade behind him was intensely funny to me.

"Fuck you, bitch!" was Jared's battle cry as he cut the creature — nearly in half, like he was splitting a log. #11 fell to the ground and Jared chopped at it like a frenzied woodsman, starting small fires on the floor in several places. I tried to stop him — such a creature's body would be valuable for study — but my displaced jaw prevented me. When he was done, there was nothing on the floor but bone shards, paste, and burn marks on the floorboards. He stepped back, breathing heavily, a massive hematoma forming on his right cheekbone. Only after several gasping breaths did he look at me, then his eyes got wide.

"Shit man, how you doing that?"

I didn't immediately know what he was referring to, but since then I have observed the phenomena repeatedly. The cuts on my fingers where the trigger guard had torn my skin were closing visibly. Bruises on my face were fading even as he watched.

Somehow he managed to drive back to my residence, where I medicated myself and iced my jaw to the point that I could pop the mandible back into place — an agonizing process, even through ice, anti-inflammatories, Novocain and whatever unnatural healing processes were operating in my own body. For there can be no doubt: I was visibly improved by the time we reached my home. In only a few days of recovery, I have already improved to a point that would have taken weeks, even in a hospital.

Apparently my new gifts are not limited solely to second sight as I thought initially. Jared's injuries, though much less severe, have healed at a normal rate. However, he informed me that during our struggle with #11, he felt a tingling sensation in his arms as he dealt the final blow. I cannot guess what that portends.

(Later.)

I have just re-read my initial impressions. What stands out now is the creature's question to me. It seems that not even the unnatural creatures I behold understand the transformation that is happening to me. Have I become a mystery even to mysteries?

October 11, 1999

Remarkable! The last vestige of soreness in my jaw passed during the night. Even more remarkable: I was contacted by "Leaf" and "Oaken." I asked why they had waited so long to contact me, and they indicated that they had been put off by my "bloodthirsty" initial actions. I assured them that I had ample proof of the creature's malignity, and suggested that we meet in order to discuss matters further. They agreed.

We met at a coffee shop, where the two of them told me a little more about themselves. They work together out of their home as web-page designers. Additionally, Oaken does "touch therapy," whatever that is, while his wife runs an independent ceramics concern on the side.

The incident at the drugstore left them deeply confused, naturally. I expressed my sympathy, and told them that I had become aware of unnatural creatures several months ago when the subject of an autopsy sat up and attempted to bite me in the throat. I explained cautiously how I heard a voice like my own say that the thing was simply *wrong*. That much was already evident to me. Then I ventured how I saw more of the

creatures and started my surveillance, but had not met others with the same experiences till now. They were suitably impressed and wished to know more.

They told me they had "seen a vision" of a dark, batlike figure killing someone in an alley close to their home. When they went to the alley they actually arrived *before* the event, which played out much like their vision — save that, with them present, the attack was aborted before it had properly begun. I asked if they had pursued or apprehended the creature, and they answered in the negative.

Curiouser and curiouser. If I thought Jared was an unlikely candidate for "delver into concealed truths," it was only because I hadn't enjoyed a long conversation with this pair. Jared is, at least, practical. Before our drugstore incident, I suspect he gave little thought to a larger world of metaphysics. Leaf and Oaken, by contrast, have put a great deal of effort into persuading themselves that a great groaning load of new-age sewage is true (or potentially true). While this gives them a framework from which to address what they saw, I fear it is one that will almost certainly lead them to incorrect, sentimental and highly subjective conclusions. Specifically, by careful manipulation of our discussion, I've learned that they are uncertain about the proper actions to take regarding the unnatural. Leaf was certainly frightened that #11 struck at her, but I suspect that both of them are somewhat "soft" when it comes to the actions that will be necessary if we are to gain any real knowledge of these creatures. However, I do have their e-mail addresses and phone number, so we will be able to keep in contact should we need to. As a courtesy, I invited them to join Jared and myself to examine #14 in its natural "habitat" this evening, before Jared's shift at the tavern.

The Diary of Alberto Ferarre

Concepçion did not look like a monster. She was pale, even for a white woman, but her lips were chapped, her fingernails cracked and her eyes were uncertain and scared. If I had not seen the devil within her, I would not have known. But I did see. Under the gaze of Christ atop Corcovado, I have seen the devil's imps at their work.

It took some time to gain her trust, but her human soul was still strong — still able to battle the evil that had been placed within her. She told me that she had been taken by a creature who admired her sculptures — that this man had entranced her with diabolical sorcery and forced her to drink his corrupting blood.

She also told me of the hunger — the lust for blood and the misery of others that drove her among the shacks of the mountainside *favelas*. There, she knew, were victims who would never be missed. Against her will, against her judgment, against her sense of right and wrong, she preyed upon the most wretched of Rio's poor. She said the hunger had made her a monster just like all the rest.

I was the one who told her no.

You're not like the rest, I said. You know what you're doing is wrong. You still have your human soul, and as long as you have that, you can repent. As long as you can repent, you can be saved.

Eventually, she agreed.

We rented a hotel room in which to cast out her demon. It seemed safer: Her home was known to her kind, and I hoped to keep mine secret from their ilk. The clerk gave me a broad wink. Yes, a black man checks into a hotel room with a white woman, surely he thought he knew what we were about. But how could he know about the Lord's work? How could he know about the Kiss of Christ?

When my lips closed upon hers, I could feel the sour, polluted blood within her — the stolen sustenance that fed her inner demon. I pulled it, drew it in, and as I did I felt the blood of sin transformed, transubstantiated within my veins into the Blood of the Lamb. The power of Christ swelled within me, filling me with joy unsurpassed by the bliss of any mortal kiss.

The demon fought, of course. Concepçion had insisted that I tie her to the chair for my own safety. She was wise. Her demon cursed me and blasphemed, its eyes were red like burning coals and its fangs cut into her own lips, but it was no match for the power of God. With but a word — a command backed by the power of the Living Word — I broke its rage and left it cowering.

Concepçion looked poorly. Her cheeks were sunken and even her lips were pale.

"I'm hungry," she said plaintively. "You can't know how hungry I am."

I encouraged her to hunger and thirst for justice.

"Please," she said, then stopped.

I asked her if she wanted me to continue — if her salvation by Christ was her true will. Trembling, she nodded. Eyes closed, she tilted her head back, her mouth open slightly.

I gave her a second kiss and this one withdrew the last traces of the corrupted blood.

When I opened my eyes, her eyes were open, too. Her mouth moved but no sound came.

I had hoped she would live. Christ has not given me that power. But I have saved one soul from damnation, and that is miracle enough for me.

(Later.)

The evening was interesting, to say the least. #14 is what I have termed an "invisible" — an entity that cannot be seen by the ordinary run of humanity. It is of the repeater type, endlessly going through a set of motions, ad infinitum.

Initially, the others were unable to perceive #14, which made me feel frustrated (and somewhat foolish). Then Leaf did something unexpected: She spoke in an odd tone of voice, "Let the light shine upon it." With exclamations of

surprise, both Jared and Oaken stared at #14. Even to my eyes, the figure of the creature seemed clearer and more solid. This is hard to quantify, however. It could be observer error caused by the reactions of my fellows. I asked Leaf how she had done it.

"I just knew," she said. "Don't you feel it? Don't you feel the living power surrounding us right now?"

I felt nothing of the sort, but Jared narrowed his eyes, stepped up to the creature and put his hand "upon" it — I use the word advisedly, since invisibles also seem to be utterly intangible. He removed his hand and it seemed that I could see a smudgy trail in the air, as if the creature was emitting a dim smoke at that point where Jared touched it. As it walked, the trail spun out behind it.

"There," he said, his voice a peculiar mix of satisfaction and confusion. "Motherfucker won't get away from me again."

"What do you mean, 'get away'?" Oaken asked. "It's not going anywhere or doing anything or hurting anyone."

"How you so sure of that? Just 'cause we don't see it doing nothing doesn't mean it ain't doing something," Jared said. Despite his mangled grammar, I found his comment insightful and concurred.

"Indeed. Seeing only the visible tip of an iceberg, one has no way of knowing how much of a hazard it is to passing ships."

"Wait! What did you *do* to it?" Leaf asked.

"Can't you see it?" I said. Oaken rolled his eyes.

"Here we go again," he commented. Jared smiled.

"Not much that can hide from you, is there Doc?"

"I see a smudgy, indistinct trail. Jared, what do you see?"

He frowned. "I see it clear, Doc. Trail of smoke, like skywriting from a plane."

Leaf and Oaken both asserted that they saw nothing. I asked how they'd known how to activate these new abilities.

"Can't you feel the presence?" Leaf asked. Other than #14, I felt nothing, of course.

"You mentioned icebergs, Doc. I think the things we've done so far may be just the beginning," Oaken said.

There was a brief pause and then I attempted to regain control of the proceedings. "This has been very illuminating so far. It is my hope that we have more to learn this evening."

"Have you tried to talk with it?" Oaken asked. I assured him that I had, many times, to no noticeable effect. I stated my belief that it was some sort of energy residue — no more "alive" than a painting or a motion picture.

"I've established that it takes no notice of small movements," I said, putting my hand through it to demonstrate. "However, larger motions do seem to erode or disrupt it." So saying, I swung my arm through it hard. Leaf and Oaken gasped as the figure distorted around my arm and reformed — but with a slight gap in its side, trailing ragged edges of torn substance.

"Notice how its expression and actions do not change: I do not think that any perception or intelligence can remain."

"How can you be sure?" Leaf asked in a whisper. "It could be feeling everything, be aware — be as smart as you or me! Who are you to judge?"

"We can't be *sure* it feels nothing — any more than we can be sure that carrots don't have a highly evolved intellect, no more than we can be certain that turnips don't scream telepathically when pulled from the ground. We must apply Occam's Razor and assume the simplest theory that fits the facts: If it shows no sign of noticing, we should assume it doesn't notice."

"But it's not like a *turnip*," Oaken said, aggrieved. "I mean, look at it!"

"I agree, it's not like a turnip. A turnip you can see unaided, and feel, and hold in your hand. In that, the turnip is much more like us than this thing is."

"I don't buy it," Leaf said. "Wherever it came from, whatever it is, it looks *human*. Do you honestly think it just spontaneously occurred in nature? That it *accidentally* took human form? How's Occam's Razor handle that theory?"

"I don't deny that there's almost certainly some intimate connection between this image and a human being, but there's also a connection between a human being and a human image on a TV screen. That doesn't make them the same thing at all."

"I won't be a party to your 'tests.'"

I was in a quandary, but the prospect of losing Oaken and Leaf — who had already revealed new abilities — was clearly a more dangerous loss than anything I was likely to gain from #14 that night. I hung my head and played the penitent.

"I'm sorry. Maybe you're right. It's just... things like this have tried to take my life. That thing from the drugstore nearly killed me, and it nearly killed Jared. We know nothing about them. You yourself saw something that was going to kill a human being — one of your neighbors. I... I was trained as a scientist, and my inclination is to understand things. Especially things that... that scare me. I guess my curiosity and fear and... I don't know, some need to exert control... I think they got the better of me. You're right. I'm sorry."

I think they bought it. Leaf looked mollified, at least. Oaken just looked uncomfortable. Jared simply rolled his eyes but kept his mouth shut. Leaf agreed to call me if she saw anything unusual, and we went our separate ways. I noticed that Leaf and Oaken loitered just enough to let Jared and myself leave first. I smiled: They didn't trust me alone with #14! On the way out, I arranged to meet Jared there after midnight in order to complete our examination.

October 14, 1999

Oaken contacted me today as I was recovering from my confrontation with #13 (an unlucky number indeed). He had incredible news. It appears that the four of us are not the only ones to come to the attention of the "living power," as Leaf insists on calling it. Indeed, Oaken believes he has found an online community of individuals with similar experiences.

Initially I was dubious, considering the disappointing and misleading fruit of my own online research on "vampires" and "ghosts." However, Oaken and Leaf (being professionals at using the "web") had considerably more luck.

The entry to the site was called anonymous-liberty.com. The site was dedicated to some libertarian claptrap about upholding individual rights through anonymity. Fortunately this naive philosophy meshes well with my (I suppose I should now say "our") need for privacy.

The paranormal questions are basically a checklist of experiences, allegedly to gather information on the "unearthly." Oaken answered the questionnaire honestly, but included

details of our experiences with #11, #14 and #15. The next day he got an invitation to join a private mailing group for "the imbued." He also received access to a secret password-protected website through the anonymous-liberty site.

I have filled out the questionnaire myself and eagerly await the opportunity to exchange information with others of similar experience. I don't believe Jared has online access, but it will be a while before he gets out of the hospital, anyways.

October 18, 1999

I "logged on" to hunter-net today. Perhaps I expected too much, but there is a great deal of unverifiable information there, lumped in with superstition of the rankest kind ("Men in Black," indeed!). On the other hand, I have found confirmation of many of my own observations. Most "hunters" find that unnatural creatures seem to favor inhabited areas, and that there seems to be a willful ignorance on the part of witnesses. Several anecdotes support my feeling that most people are willing to believe any coincidental or absurd rationale, rather than accept the actions of a creature from outside their own paradigm.

I have also signed on to their mailing list, which asks that you conceal your name and adopt a descriptive phrase or word instead. I chose "doctor," of course. Leaf picked "potter." Oaken was unwilling to tell me his "nickname" — not that it was difficult to deduce ("healer") since each ID is followed by a number, assigned in the order in which you're accepted. I'm Doctor119 — there seem to be a great number of us! My companions are Potter116 and Healer115. The most influential member seems to be Witness1 (who founded the list and built the site). I've been going through archival messages as quickly as I reasonably can. Bookworm55 and Hunter9 also seem to have their heads on straight. The perspective of Cop90 is also quite useful. Unfortunately, for every well-thought-out insight there are several posts of blather from BlueGirl76 or Mythmaster10. There are also a few who just seem crazy — God45 is an important case in point.

Surprisingly, a main thread of conversation has been self-examination. Everyone seems to ask "Why us?" with the intelligent minority asking "Why now?" The answers (as one might expect) range from the narcissistic to the absurd to the untestable. From what I can tell, the most popular explanations are as follows.

1) We have been "blessed" by "angels of the Lord" in order to "smite the forces of evil." If this is so, God is not very picky. Not only is the list highly ecumenical (with a decent ratio of atheists and agnostics), there are a number of respondents who have criminal records and do not seem repentant in the least.

2) This sort of thing has been going on since the beginning of time. The only reason we've found each other now is that technology has provided global communications. Superficially attractive, but the problem is that there isn't a single "imbued" who awakened in the '60s, '70s, '80s or early '90s. Even I seem relatively "old" among these people, given my experience several months ago.

3) Human psychic powers are only now becoming awakened: We "imbued" are the next evolutionary step. Never mind that any scientist could tell you that a "sudden" movement in evolutionary time is still a thousand times longer than all of recorded human history. A modified version of this argument claims that modern pollutants have somehow unlocked hidden potentials within our brains. Again, any scientist can see that's about as likely as randomly "discovering" that your car gets a thousand miles to the gallon if you pour in liquid estrogen.

Email Program

Subject: Rots

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: doctor119

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Send Message

Get Messages

Description: Rots appear normal to ordinary sight. They are visible and tangible. They seem far less common than invisibles, about as common as flickers. Rots are generally pale: Even Negro rots have a pallor around their lips and the palms of their hands.

To second sight, these beings appear as decomposing, walking corpses. Many of the rots I have seen were further infused with some sort of black aura — as if they had oil instead of blood coursing through their veins. Some of them had very little of this inky plasma; others were almost completely covered. Only a minority was completely free of it.

Activities: With the exception of the "unstained" rots (that is, those who lacked the inky plasma), the rots I have observed are strictly nocturnal. They come from a wide variety of social levels, ranging from several who appear to be quite rich, to others who seem to live a marginal, "outlaw" lifestyle. They appear to be primarily urban, and on two occasions I have observed them feeding on human beings. This feeding takes the form of drinking blood — in one case from the neck, in the other from the large artery along the inside of the thigh.

Threats: I have attempted to capture one of these creatures, but have not yet succeeded. After my second attempt, they have seemed wary of me, which leads me to suspect that they are in communication with each other, either through some sort of group consciousness or by more mundane means. They are preternaturally fast. One of them exhibited physical strength far beyond the normal levels for a woman of her size, but others seemed to have more "normal" physical attributes. One was able to generate some sort of "psychic screen" which shielded him. Only through the use of second sight was I able to locate him.

Vulnerabilities: While I have not had the leisure for full experimentation, I have observed that rots are extremely robust. While they can be struck and harmed by bullets, knives and blunt weapons, they seem far more resistant to such trauma than humans. In my last encounter, a group of several of them were driven off by a makeshift firebomb — indeed, one of the fleeing rots seemed deeply panicked by the sight of the flames. If the germ theory (see below) is correct, this might explain why fire frightens them more than an impact injury that can only harm small portions of their host bodies.

Theories: Obviously these creatures are the source of the persistent "vampire myths" in many cultures. That does not, however, tell us much about their nature.

One possibility is that a biological agent causes "vampirism." After all, you and I are nothing more than a collection of eukaryote cells. Any change to our body has a result on a cellular level, and therefore a cellular invader could have drastic effects on our body.

A man named Waves Forest has posited the idea that prokaryote cells (cells without a nucleus; the cause of many infectious diseases) have evolved telepathic communication. They are thus able to coordinate their activities — just as the cells which compose your body coordinate their activities through the electrical impulses of the nervous system. It's well known that the most successful disease is that which does not kill its host, but only parasitizes it, or even *helps* the host. (Nucleated cells may have developed when one cell invaded another, neither was able to kill the other, and both eventually evolved into a mutually beneficial harmony.) Suppose there was a disease that infused its host with paranormal speed and resistance to damage? However, why stop there? This illness, if it became sophisticated enough (and a telepathic prokaryote cell could develop some very sophisticated structures indeed), could influence or even control the behavior of its host.

Perhaps this is the explanation for rots. Perhaps this disease is dormant in some living humans and only becomes dominant after death. Once a badly infected person dies, his or her immune system shuts down. The robust "rot cell" grows unchecked, invades the entire body, repairs the fatal damage and takes over. Even the brain cells — the memory of the dead person — can be accessed. Certainly the brain (and whatever remains of the decedent's personality) influences the behavior of the new, infected corpse.

The germ theory can explain the blood drinking. In addition to being an easily digested source of nourishment, human blood is full of other germs. All prokaryote cells are able to exchange genetic code in order to acquire new abilities and immunities (this is why so many illnesses are becoming resistant to penicillin). By draining the blood from other humans, the "rot cells" can gain new immunities.

4) As the millennium approaches, our benevolent space brethren have given us these powers to eradicate the scourge of demons/ negative energy beings/ malevolent space creatures (take your pick). Unfortunately, this seems to be the most reasonable explanation. It explains why it's happened so suddenly, why there seems to be no connecting factor between the people chosen (other than physical proximity), and it explains why we receive little in the way of explanation.

Ironically, few seem to ask what we are supposed to do with our supposed "edges," the abilities that we all seem to manifest (though I have no idea of the range of those capabilities beyond what I've seen demonstrated by my "colleagues"). Members on the list seem to intuitively agree that our purpose is to address the unnatural; we all receive our "true sight" and edges in the face of such creatures. Yet Witness1's apparent audible hallucination — "Inherit the Earth" — strikes a chord for me, despite its overt biblical overtones. What this phrase means exactly is unclear, though of late — since my initial encounters and then events at the drug store — I sense an urgency to deal with the creatures I see, as if time is short. Yet I don't yet know what I am to "inherit" beyond protecting the world that I already know — or once did.

October 19, 1999

Through hunter-net, I have contacted two other area "imbued" who seem eager to work with me. "Builder50" and "Cabbie22" are both local to Chicago and, more importantly, both share a dedication to the task of understanding the paranormal. Unfortunately, it is becoming increasingly apparent that Leaf and Oaken do not share this passion for knowledge. Alone, I might have been able to persuade them to see reason, but they have fallen in with a soft-headed "new-age" faction on the list. With "SpiritGuide48" and "Crystal23" bolstering their sentimentality, they may be lost for good.

Unfortunate, but I have made appointments with Builder and Cabbie to meet face to face this evening.

October 20, 1999

Last night was remarkable, to say the least. Builder (Scott Fairlane) and Cabbie (Guadalupe Droin) seem to have much in common with Jared: specifically their "shoot/ slash/ burn first and ask questions later" attitude. While I am pleased (and justly, I think) with my notebooks on nearly 20 of the area's paranormal inhabitants, past or present, Guadalupe claims to have spotted upward of 50. (This could simply be bragging. Unfortunately, she has made little effort to keep careful track of more than a few.)

No sooner had they met Jared than he invited them to observe #17, an invisible and our latest find. We went toward its usual residence, but Jared spied its trail before we arrived. We followed it through a winding path of streets. I suspect Scott and Lupe (as she prefers to be called) were getting somewhat exasperated, until we spotted #17 and its companions.

Email Program

Subject: Us

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: bookworm55

Copied To:

Send Message

Get Messages

I've followed the discussion of rots with some interest. In particular, I'm concerned with what our theories about their nature say about *us*. Like Doctor119, I'm hesitant to jump to the most obvious and facile conclusion — that rots, invisibles and flickers are "demons," "devils" and "evil spirits" — while we have been selected by "angels" to combat them.

On the other hand, the good Doctor's explanations leave some unanswered questions. The disease hypothesis explains the rots, but does it explain the chosen? Perhaps their powers come from a benevolent infection. Where did we get ours?

A different infection is a possibility, I suppose — but then, who's patient zero? Even given the rapid mutation and genetic transmission factors involved with prokaryote cells, the imbuing phenomenon seems far too speedy. Perhaps one capability, or a couple, but over a dozen have been reported on this list alone. Furthermore, people seem to be getting imbued all over the world. If it was an infection, one would expect it to start at some epicenter and spread outward.

Another theory I've heard is that these powers are the innate psychic legacies of humankind — it's just that we've only recently begun to throw off the rot-cell-imposed shackles that kept these powers in check. Again, however, I have to ask — why now? Why everywhere all at once?

No, the prevalence, suddenness and variety of effect argues for an outside source. This isn't something we did: Something was done to us. On one level, the question of "why" has an obvious answer — reasoning from use shows us that we were given these powers to contend with the rots, flickers and invisibles. But let's look, for a moment, at a deeper why. Why do the Messengers want us to act? What's *their* agenda?

I'll grant that some of the creatures we've seen are clearly dangerous and inimical to humanity — but others seem completely innocuous. Sure, seen with second sight they appear menacing and repugnant. But just remember that that may be more a reflection of the Messengers' agenda than of these beings' true nature.

They were amid the burned-out wreckage of what was once a club or theater of some sort. I counted at least four other invisibles present. My arguments for quiet observation fell on deaf ears. Scott, Jared and Lupe were out of the car, attacking, practically before the vehicle stopped.

The invisibles initially appeared ready to stand and fight. One of them pointed at Scott with a wicked grin (literally larger than humanly possible, nearly splitting its head in two). As I watched, Scott's shirt burst into flames. With a gesture, a second seemed to animate the ash of the setting, forming it into anthropomorphic figures that threatened Scott and Lupe. Both of them struck at these creatures, which seemed invulnerable to their attacks — but which also seemed unable to harm them.

Then Scott pointed at the laughing invisible and caused some sort of effect. I don't know what it was — I perceived it as a gas, but not one affecting normal vision. It struck the laughing invisible, which looked terrified for a moment, then dropped straight through the ground, leaving only something like a stain behind. The other spirits followed suit. We were, of course, unable to follow.

I chastised my fellow hunters for their hasty actions, but they were in no mood to hear it. Scott and Jared seemed to think they'd won a major victory. Lupe was a bit more sensitive when I told them that the creatures had no doubt fled, not died, and that they now knew what we looked like. The men wouldn't listen.

October 21, 1999

A woman named Gretchen Maggs has been arrested. The police found her standing over the burned and butchered remnants of a corpse. She has loudly and publicly stated that she did it because the victim was "the walking dead," a vampire whom she had seen drinking blood and whom she had followed to his lair in order to attack him during daylight. The hunter list is buzzing. Everyone wants to know if Gretchen Maggs is one of us, or simply a lunatic with delusions that mimic our reality. Witness1 has called for a complete roll call of everyone on the list. After initial responses were posted to everyone, he requested that the remainder be sent to him directly. However, many of the posts included notices such as "Seer6, Stalker32 and MusicMan40 are all dead." Of the nearly 120 members of the list, at least a quarter seem to be out of the fight, permanently.

October 22, 1999

I was sleeping when Leaf called me. She sounded nearly hysterical and told me to turn on WGN. I did so and was shocked by the spectacle of our companion Jared in the news studio, telling an anchorperson that Gretchen Maggs was speaking the truth: that corpses walk our streets clothed in flesh. Furthermore, he said that he had been given abilities by a "higher power" in order to combat their "plague." I watched in growing horror as he offered to demonstrate.

He asked the anchorperson to "give me something you don't mind seeing wrecked — like an old chair or something." They initially brought out a steel folding chair, which he stood by and swung at. I presume he used the glowing club — the people on the list call effects like it "the cleaver." I could not see it this time (because it was broadcast on TV?). I could see only its effect. The chair was knocked back and skittered away across the stage. However, the camera angle was such that it was not immediately apparent that Jared hadn't touched it. He asked for a different chair, one that was flammable, and a cloth-and-wood armchair was produced. Using the cleaver, he proceeded to burn and demolish it before the stunned eyes of the audience. He then went into a diatribe about ghosts, the walking dead and monsters hidden in human form.

When they returned from a commercial break, Jared was gone from the set.

October 23, 1999

I awoke this morning to a shower of gore. My dresser, my rugs, my blankets and sheets were drenched with blood, and a particularly large gobbet of unidentifiable flesh struck me in the face.

I cannot doubt what I saw. It was there. I felt the stickiness, smelled the particular odor of fresh, untreated blood, felt it congealing in my hair and on my skin. I immediately rushed into the shower. My heart rate was elevated and my breathing was short, but I attempted to reason through a way to clean the unaccountable mess without arousing suspicion. However, my efforts of thought turned out to be fruitless. When I returned to the bedroom, the mess had cleaned itself. No sign of the blood and gore remained.

Perhaps it was a hallucination, but if so it was extremely vivid and unprovoked. I should have beheld the scene with second sight, but in my distress I did not think to do so.

As I sit here and regain my composure, the more likely the hallucination hypothesis becomes. As for a cause, perhaps this is the malice of one of the paranormal creatures I have beheld. While disturbing, I suppose I should be grateful if this is the worst it can do.

Although... I shouldn't dismiss any possibility. Is it possible that I am simply losing my mind? Perhaps, after obsessively pursuing the fantastic so intensely, at such great cost, my mind has snapped and given me a delusion of finding what I seek?

Surely not. What of Jared and Oaken and Lupe? They must be real. I have a VCR recording of Jared on the news — that's not a delusion. The scars on my body from #2, #7 and #11, those are concrete and real. At least, they seem so to me — as real as my coffee cups and computer and reclining chair.

If these fantastic visions — the showers of blood, the phantom figures, the glowing swords — are delusions, then all of my world could be a delusion. Is my mind strong enough to create such a detailed lie? Yet if I can conceive of such a thing in the first place, who is to say it's impossible?

No. That solipsistic path is ultimately fruitless. If I'm not mad now, that sort of reasoning would certainly madden me eventually. I must trust in the strength of my own mind and perceptions. I have no other choice, really.

(Later.)

Jared has been arrested. His lawyer called me from the police station and said his client had specifically asked to see me. When pressed for details, he said that Jared had been

MONDAY

Here's the question: How do you know if you're going crazy or not? There's those questionnaires for alcoholism and drug dependency, but what about going full bore, batshit, out of touch with reality NUTS? By definition, a crazy mind isn't working right. But the mind is the only instrument I've got for examining my own mind. It's like a one handed man trying to bandage a cut on his palm. My mind keeps tripping over itself.

SANE

1) I still seem able to think in a logical, orderly fashion.

2) I didn't get any sudden shock that might have driven me over the edge (other than the shock of seeing hallucinations, I guess — but that's kind of a chicken and egg question, isn't it?)

3) I had a good childhood without traumas or molestation or anything.

4) No drugs, except some booze and prescription stuff — but nothing mind altering and nothing illegal.

5) I just had a checkup, and nothing seemed weird to the doctor.

NOT SANE

1) I heard voices in my head that weren't my own. That sounds like schizophrenia.

2) I saw Jen Salier, and I know she's been dead for eight months. That sounds like a hallucination or delusions or something.

3) I saw Bill Kilgowan looking like a corpse. That sounds like a hallucination too.

Is that the way it starts? One day, everything is ticking along like normal, and the next day you're seeing ghosts and goblins popping out of the woodwork? But things were going well. I'm happily married, my kids are doing fine in school. I just got a sweetheart deal refinancing my mortgage. Why would I go crazy?

Let's see. I guess there are three possibilities.

1. I'm off my nut, having delusions. (Shit, even that stuff about the good wife and the kids could be a delusion! I could be locked up in a madhouse somewhere, I guess. Still, everything seems real, except for Jen and Bill.)

2. My reasoning mind is okay, but for some reason I'm perceiving things that aren't real. I think I read something in Reader's Digest about some guy who was taking a business trip, and his luggage somehow got a bunch of drugs spilled on them so that when he put on his drug soaked pants he started to freak out. I haven't taken any business trips lately, but I suppose anything's possible. I didn't feel any disorientation though, and the weird things I saw were so — subtle. Everything looked normal and hard edged and okay, except for Jen and Bill. There was no blurring between "normal" and "abnormal." If I was really "tripping," wouldn't EVERYTHING get weird? I just don't know. I don't even know anyone I could ask.

3. The really scary possibility: I'm sane and what I saw was real. But how could it be? What would that mean? That the residents of Green Lakes, Iowa, elected, what, a zombie as mayor?

But — it all seems so real. It's not like I have any motivation for such wild flights of fancy. I don't gain anything from it, and that's part of the point of madness, right? A retreat from reality? I don't want to retreat from reality. I want to retreat from this horrible fantasy.

All right. If I'm totally crazy, I'll try to hide it. I'll act sane. If my mind is so impressionable, I'll try to stamp it with the way things really are. If you have delusions of reality, they aren't really delusions, right? Maybe I'll just get better on my own if I don't acknowledge the madness. After all, I got from sane to crazy on my own. Maybe I can get back on my own.

If I'm sane but having hallucinations for some reason, that's an even better reason not to acknowledge them. If this is from a chemical or something, it's even more likely to wear off on its own.

If I'm seeing the truth... hell, that's the best argument yet for acting like nothing is wrong. If Bill Kilgowan is a walking corpse, the last thing I want to do is get his attention.

TUESDAY

My plan is working, I hope. I saw Bill today coming out of the courthouse at lunch time. I said hello. He grinned, shook my hand, talked about the weather. It was all normal. His hand felt a little cold, but it's autumn and he'd probably forgotten his gloves. He looked like an ordinary man in his fifties. Maybe a little pale, but we haven't had much sun for weeks. Everyone's pale. I'm pale. It's normal. It's all normal.

THURSDAY

I heard the voice again today, and I don't think I was the only one. Bill was walking by our office, and I heard "HE DOES NOT LIVE" clear as day. I looked up and I saw him as a corpse again — all rotting and fetid and gaunt. What's more, Betty saw it too. I saw her staring at him, eyes wide. I went over to her and asked her to come help me fix the copy machine. I practically had to drag her from her desk. I asked her what she'd seen, and she played dumb. She was around when I saw Jen Salier's ghost too, and she acted like nothing was going on. I asked her about that, and she started to cry. Turns out she saw Jen too, but she didn't say anything for fear of looking crazy. So the whole time I was asking Jen what was going on, what was happening, Betty was just faking it, acting like nothing was wrong. Now that I think about it, Jude was in the office then too. She'd gotten up to get coffee or something just before I saw Jen. Maybe she saw Jen too, and was running away?

When I called her on it, Betty said she'd seen Jen's ghost and had seen Bill as a corpse. At first, I was relieved that someone else had seen it. I mean, that's science, right? If someone can verify your results, that makes something a fact. So it's a fact that Bill is a walking dead man.

That's when I stopped being relieved. If Bill is some kind of monster, then what am I supposed to do about it? Betty immediately started talking about trying to kill him. Only she said "it."

I can't believe this: Betty Smolenski, my receptionist for the last eight years, was calmly talking about how to get the mayor alone and assassinate him. She went to the library and photocopied a bunch of pages out of a guide for mystery writers, a book on the best ways to kill people or something. She told me she didn't want to check it out, it might look suspicious. She's just taken it for granted that Bill has to be killed.

I mean, Jesus. I voted for him. It.

Betty's completely paranoid. She says there's no way of knowing how many of "them" there are or what "they're" up to. I said the only one I'd seen was Bill, but according to her, that doesn't mean anything. After all, he fooled us before. He fooled us for a long time — no way of knowing how long really. And he looked normal to me just yesterday. So I guess she's right, we can't trust our naked eyes anymore.

Who else is in on it? Carl Mueller? It would make a lot of sense for Bill to get the police on his side. Hell, it made sense even when I thought he was human, alive. Is Carl one of them? What about his deputies? Bill has been spending a lot of time with them lately, talking about their "anti-gang initiatives." But what do they really talk about behind closed doors?

Bill fired Janet Wilkes last month. I thought he was right at the time — Janet was always a pill, and not much good for the city planning department. But what if there was something entirely different going on? Maybe she knew too much? On the other hand, Bill has to keep his cover by doing things a normal mayor would do. Firing a lousy employee is right in character.

It's not fair. I don't know anything about this stuff! How am I supposed to know what to do? I'm not even religious. But I can't just sit around, wringing my hands. I mean, this isn't right, it's not natural. It's like I'M sane but the WORLD is crazy. It doesn t make any sense, everything is put together wrong. I didn t look for this. I didn't ask for this, and now I have to do something, but I don't know what to do.

I'm 52. I'm a civil servant. I haven't shot a rifle since I got out of ROTC, and I have to kill a dead thing that's running my town? Is that it?

Where do I even start?

arraigned on a drug charge after police stopped him for a broken taillight. The attorney also said that it would be a difficult charge to beat, "given his priors."

I'm disappointed, but not surprised. It seems that Jared was already on parole for a drug-possession charge. The police spotted a bag of heroin in the gap between his driver's seat and door, the same little nook where I keep my ice scraper. It's too late to go see him today, but I will first thing tomorrow.

October 24, 1999

When I emerged from my apartment, two invisibles were waiting for me — #17 and one of its companions from the previous evening. It took a colossal effort of will, but I pretended I did not see them. They followed me as I went to the police station, even getting in my car with me.

Second sight seems to perceive no reflections, so it was difficult to keep them in sight. Like mortals, their tendency was to stay behind a person when following him. However, when they saw my destination, they became highly agitated — I am tempted to say "amused." One gestured at me and my hands were suddenly covered with blood.

It was early, but not so early that there was no one on the street. A woman saw me walking toward the police station, my arms ensanguined up to the elbows, and she began screaming. I immediately ducked into an alley close to the police station, and the two invisibles followed me.

Words may fail me now. I was enraged, almost beyond reason. The unseen creatures were tormenting me, deliberately framing me in front of the police. I threw off my bloodied gloves, seized a garbage can and flung it at — or more properly through — one of my tormentors. He buckled and fell, then stood with a grin and stepped *through* the garbage can. I swung at him clumsily and my fist passed through him, leaving no sign of harm. The other invisible looked frightened, but the primary one — I guess he's #18 — simply mocked me. Their mouths moved but both were utterly silent, though they could apparently hear each other. I saw his mouth moving, but when he realized I couldn't hear him, he resorted to the most childish and vulgar sort of gesturing. Livid, I was screaming at both of

them and flailing with my fists when two police officers came around the corner.

I recognized their attitude — the "take it easy" approach of authority figures confronted by a madman. I had used it myself in the hospital. With a tremendous effort of will, I calmed myself and asked them what seemed to be the problem.

"Problem? Looks like you're the one with the problem, pal."

I took a deep breath. "Am I under arrest?"

They exchanged a glance. "I dunno. You calmed down?"

Despite the grimaces and invisible taunting of the spirits, I attempted to maintain my composure. "I believe I am."

"So what's your problem?"

I took a deep breath and prepared a big lie. "I found out that my friend Jared Shoemaker has been arrested for drug possession. Again. I thought I could come down here and talk to him calmly, but the closer I got, the more angry I became with him, until... I guess I had a bit of a tantrum." I grinned weakly at that last, mentally begging them to buy it.

"A tantrum, huh?" I could see his eyes on my gloves and sleeves. The phantom gore had vanished. "You really should watch that temper."

I just nodded, head downcast.

"Look, go home and get some rest, okay?"

"I was really hoping I could see my friend."

The cop narrowed his eyes, and I immediately backed off. "But perhaps you're right. You're right. I really should come back when I'm under less stress." I stooped to pick up my gloves. "I apologize."

"Just don't let it happen again."

Throughout this exchange, #18 was persistently in my field of view, mocking my situation. When I got into my car, it followed me, but was unable to ride along because the car passed right through it.

I left an urgent message for Scott, then set about reaching Jared by telephone. It took me two hours, but I succeeded. Even then, our conversation was brief, but foreboding.

"Doc, I think there was something in the car with me that night."

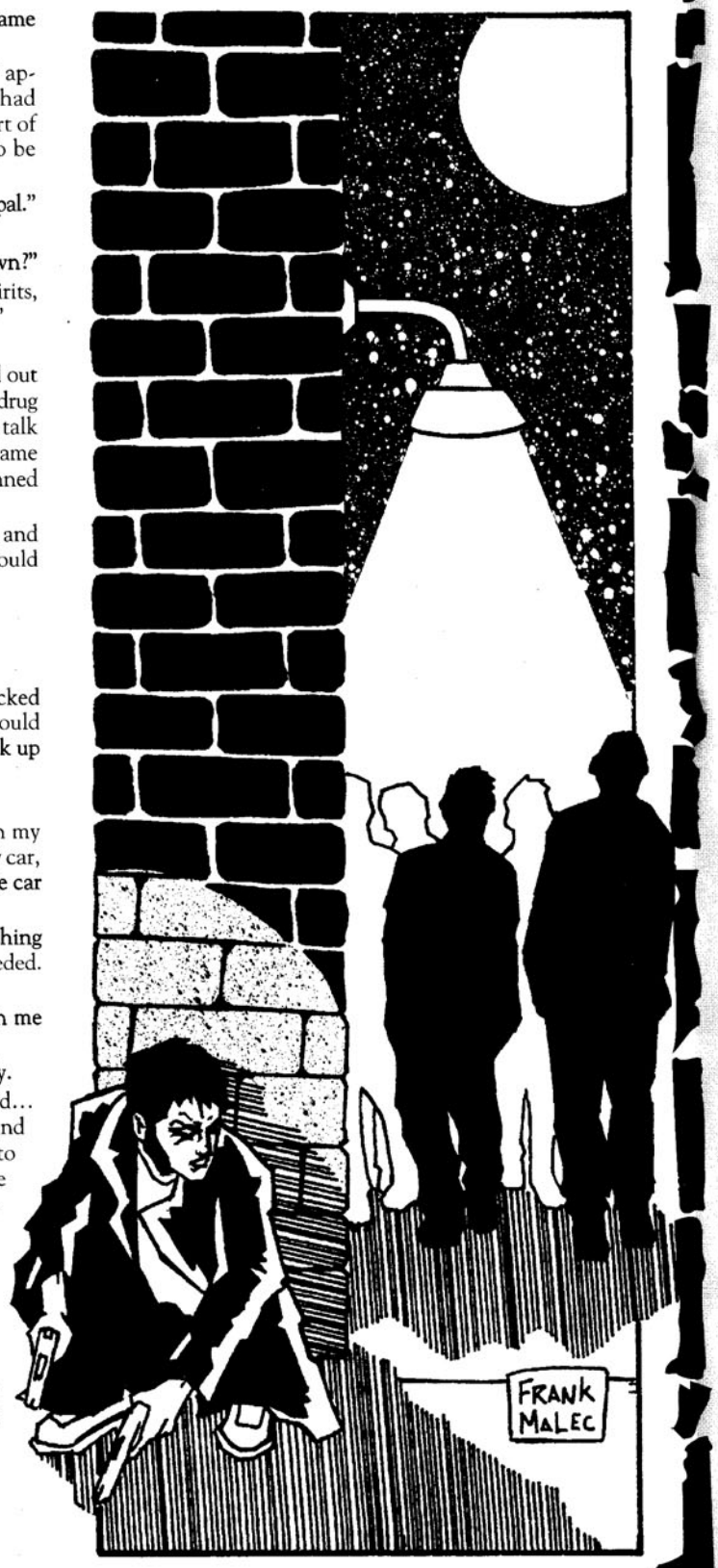
I bit back a sarcastic reply and asked him to clarify.

"Look, when the cops stopped me, for just a second... I smelled something terrible, a stink like shit, Doc, and then I thought I saw an arm reach out of the back seat to plant that fucking bag. It was right there, right behind me the whole time! The cops were on me fast. I didn't have time to hide the bag. I couldn't see anything in the back seat, but it was dark back there... like, *too* dark, you know?"

"What are you saying, Jared?"

"I'm saying I was set up! Someone, *something* followed me and set me up." He took a long, ragged breath, then continued. "That ain't all. Something happened to me here in jail. I ain't sure what, but something happened."

"What are you talking about?"



"Last night, they took me out of my cell — the others on the block told me that much, not meaning to — *but I don't remember it.* I was away for a couple fuckin' hours!"

"You remember *nothing*?"

He was quiet for a moment, then he said, "I remember eyes. Two eyes drilling into me, big and... and golden or something."

We were both silent for a moment, then he said, "I don't think I can stay here, Doc."

"What do you mean, Jared?"

"I mean I got to get out."

My heart started to palpitate. "Jared, your lawyer will certainly get you past this trumped-up charge."

"Can I trust you, Doc?"

I told him he could.

(Later.)

I woke up to screams. It was #17, who was somehow producing loud, piercing screams from nowhere. Its mouth wasn't moving. It was looming right in front of me when my eyes opened, and I'm afraid I shrieked involuntarily. I tried to strike it, but it danced back out of my reach, grinning and giving me "the bird."

Then, I... this part is hazy, maybe still part of a dream, but it seemed I heard a voice again, like the first time months ago. This time it said, "SEIZE IT WITH YOUR GAZE." It was as if I was thinking to myself, but it was not *my* thought. At that moment, disoriented and rudely awakened, it seemed perfectly reasonable that I could halt the creature with a simple glare — and it worked. I will admit to a definite glow of *schadenfreude* as I beheld its discomfort when it realized it could not escape my presence. I telephoned Scott. Our conversation, as I recall, went something like this.

"Who...? Fuck, Doc, do you know what time it is?"

"I have captured an invisible. Please come here right away to help me deal with it."

I knew... somehow... that if I took my eyes off it, the creature would be able to flee. Accordingly, I told Scott to come to my bedroom window.

While I waited, I performed a few makeshift experiments on #17. I hurled a candlestick at it, which passed through its presence without apparent effect. I next held a lit candle in the middle of its location, with no apparent effect, other than increasing its anger and fear. As I kept it pinned, it used its tricks — blood ran down the walls; snakes and spiders crawled forth from the corners, leaving tiny trails on the floor; shadows reformed themselves into figures of menace. Yet I did not allow myself to be distracted. By now, I knew they would fade when the creature departed.

The doorbell rang, but I ignored it, hoping that Scott would remember my instructions. The ringing continued, and then I heard another sound: a tap at my windowsill. While still staring at #17 I fumbled the window open.

"Jesus Christ!" Scott exclaimed.

"You can see my problem, I presume."

"What the fuck is it?"

"It's an illusion, nothing more. Do you see the invisible?"

"Yeah. Stand back, Doc." Scott stuck his hands through the window and gestured. Once again, the roiling fog I had seen before seemed to pour off his body toward the creature. Since I had my eyes locked on the being, I could see the effect in detail. The translucent "flesh" of its body seemed to evaporate at the touch of the gas, revealing ephemeral bone and viscera. The creature dropped to its knees, hands clasped in a posture of supplication. I prepared to extort a promise from it to stay away from me, but with a curse, Scott struck at it with the fog again. The effects upon the creature were the same, though less dramatic. Scott collapsed. That broke my concentration.

I looked at Scott and saw that he had fallen to the ground. #17 raced through the door (without opening it) and I have not seen it since. At the moment, I was more concerned with my fellow "imbued." Climbing out the window,

INTERPOL case file 0034297375

(continued)

walked for many miles to the store. You must understand, my son, my firstborn, had been very sick. After the oil company bought our land from the government, and the men in government trucks came to kill us all, my husband died. I did not have much money, and when we came to a new place the people there did not like us. They thought that the trouble with the army and the oil company would follow us. We had to live in a filthy place. My son got sick. The man from the food company said it was from eating dirty food, and that if I bought the food in his jars, my son would grow healthy again. So I set out, leaving my son and daughters with my sister.

"When I arrived, there was a long line to see the man from the food company, but when I saw him, suddenly my eyes were opened. I saw that he was not a man at all, but a spirit with the head of a jackal. I saw my dead husband standing by my side. I could see through my husband's ghost, like a mirage on the plains, but I could also see him, as I saw him on the night when the men from the army trucks shot him.

"I was not the only one who could see the jackal-beast. The other women saw. Many screamed and ran. Others fought him. Maybe I was not the only one helped by spirits of the past, for the women who fought used magic, but the beast from the food company was too strong. It grew large, and its hands turned into claws like a lion. The others all died.

"You have arrested me. Why? I have killed no human being. I have only fought the evil that would gnaw at you, and me, and all our country. You can lock me up. What is that to me? My home lies dead. The world is a prison to me now. Would you kill me? I have watched my husband die and return. I don't fear suffering or death.

"Perhaps you have been fooled into following the jackals, or perhaps you think you will be rewarded for your loyalty. Either way you are a fool. The only reward they offer is the chance to be among the last ones eaten. Perhaps they will have us all in the end, but I will fight alongside the spirits of the past and break the creatures' jaws even as they close on my throat."

I found him clammy and pale. His pupils were dilated, and his pulse was irregular and thready. With a great deal of effort, I picked him up and started toward the front door, only to realize that I had no key. I was setting him down in the bushes when a shadowy figure came around the corner of the house and saw me.

"What the fuck?" it said in guttural and ill-educated tones.

I was struck dumb for a moment, as was this newcomer. When we spoke, it was at the same moment. I asked what he was doing on my property. He asked if I was Dr. Van Wyk. Then we were silent before speaking simultaneously once again. I said it was none of his business, and he said Jared had sent him.

That was a relief. "If you're a friend of Jared's, stay with this man. I have to open the front door."

I climbed through the window and opened the door — after putting on my robe and putting my pistol in my pocket. After all, I had only this stranger's word that he was from Jared, though I must say they seemed to be of a type.

When I unlocked the door, he was standing there with Scott slung over his shoulder like a sack of grain. I hurried him inside, then looked around to see if the neighbors were awake. At my request, the man carried Scott downstairs into my clinic — a setting that seemed to make him nervous. He asked what I did and I gave him the usual folderol about being a clinical consultant.

A cursory examination of Scott indicated no ailment I could identify. His heartbeat was slow and weak, blood pressure low, temperature low. He seemed to be in shock, so I put his feet in the stirrups of my examination chair, lowered his head and put a blanket on him. As I prepared a stimulant injection, Jared's friend started to fidget.

"Uh, Doctor? I got a message from Jared. It's kind of important."

"Indeed? Let's have it."

"Well, he's, uh, he's kind of going to break out of jail at five this morning."

I nearly dropped the syringe.

"What? How does he plan to do that?"

"He said he was going to use his... uh... powers." The man shifted his feet. "He said you an' he both have powers and shit. That you're like... saints."

"Saints?"

"That you do miracles, an' stop evil spirits and stuff."

As I've said, he struck me as poorly educated, but even his unshaped mind was sophisticated enough to be embarrassed by the explanation he'd been given.

"Jared showed me some stuff he could do, an' he was on TV."

"Well, it's certainly true that Jared and I — as well as this man — have some unusual capabilities. I'd hardly consider myself a 'saint.'" As I said this, I gave Scott his injection.

"You gonna help him, though, right, Doc?"

"I'm not sure. His plan is ill-founded. Does he really think he can do it?"

"He got no choice, Doc! He said he's gonna get put in the sickroom tonight to keep the master thing away from him, then he's gonna get out right before dawn. He thinks they can't chase him during the day.... Is that right?"

"If they have as much influence with the police as he seems to think, they may not have to pursue him in person. He's not even armed!"

"He got the sword of faith and the strong arm of righteousness! He showed me. He can do those miracles."

"We'll go." Scott interceded, his eyes now open, bloodshot and bleary.

"Scott? What happened to you?"

He grinned a crooked grin. "When I use the death fog, I die a little. I thought you knew that, Doc." He turned his head toward the other man. "What's your name?"

"I'm Jarvis — Jared's brother." I can only assume he meant "brother" in the familial, not the colloquial sense.

"We'll take my truck," Scott ventured. "The license plates are dirty, so no one will see 'em."

"Scott, you're in no shape to drive."

"I'll drive," Jarvis volunteered.

"Hold on a moment," I said severely. "Scott, do you really think Jared has any chance of escape? We might just be sticking our necks in a noose he's tied."

"I don't know," Scott said, "But I know this: He knows where you live, where I live and where my wife and kids live. I know that if we abandon him, we're going to be next up for *liquidation*. I've watched the walking dead threaten my family. Nothing matters to me more than stopping them — *nothing*."

He struggled off the table. "Let's go, Jarvis. We don't need him." Scott's knees buckled as he said so.

"You idiot," I muttered. "Give me a moment to get my things."

It was a half-hour drive to the police station. I found it deeply surreal, possibly due to some self-medication. (Sleep deprivation has only one cure, but every med student learns a few amelioratives.) My sense of dread was oddly tempered by the Halloween displays that seemed to gild every street. I found myself thinking back to the premature delivery of Rebecca's baby when they'd hoped for a Christmas child. My early days as an intern, swapping hangover cures after ER parties. Working the morgue on New Years. A strange time of year, when we all worship peace by getting drunk and killing one another. I haven't spoken to Rebecca for two years. My niece will turn six in a few days. I have no idea what kind of gift or card is appropriate for a six-year-old.

I've been pursuing the walking dead for what seems like forever, but only today do I realize how much of my life has drifted away from me.

I don't know why I'm so introspective. Perhaps the storm of bizarre input — #17, Scott's collapse, Jared's escape attempt — has so pummeled my brain that it's had to form strange new synaptic connections, linking my current-day perceptions with desires and memories left buried deep.

I'm so tired. Must remember to write a prescription for more stimulants tomorrow. I'm almost out.

Nonetheless, I should write down what happened. Get it while it's in my mind. Tomorrow it could all seem like a dream. It seems like one now.

We arrived at the police station around 4:50. There was some discussion. Jared wanted to drive. Jarvis, I mean. Scott and I stationed ourselves in the back of his sport-utility vehicle to be ready to help Jared in with us when we spotted him. Scott pulled out a giant pair of bolt cutters in anticipation of Jared's handcuffs. I had bandages and a blanket.

We heard the gunshots before we saw him. Jared came around the corner at a full run, but awkward, stumbling. He had the cleaver in his hand and blood was pouring down his left leg. I opened the back of the truck and shouted for him, just as two *things* came around the corner. It was hard to see them in the pre-dawn light. I think they were rots, the type with the black mist all around them. I fired at them and struck one, but the creature only slowed down. The second lunged at Jared and slashed at him with its bare hands, raking his back. He stumbled forward just as two police officers rounded the corner, guns in hand. Viewed with second sight, both of them had black stains that seemed to correspond to their circulatory systems.

Scott screamed a curse in a hoarse voice, and once again shed the venomous fog from his body. It billowed about the closest rot, and flesh visibly shriveled on its bones. Jared made a tremendous leap, catching the back of the truck. Then the second rot was upon us. With a snarl, it leapt onto the bumper and grabbed the back door.

Both cops opened fire. Scott was pulling Jared into the truck and shouting at Jarvis to floor it. The rot that had jumped onto the truck began to crawl inside. I looked at it and shouted, "Freeze!" It hesitated for a moment, then surged forward into the cab. Its hands were hideous claws that sank into my face. I could feel them pierce my cheek; I got their graveyard taste for a moment. Then Jared struck at it with his cleaver and Scott followed suit with a blowtorch.

The flames seemed to send it into a frenzy. I didn't dare use the pistol in such close quarters, but I grabbed a power drill. It continued to flail wildly at Scott and Jared, but both men grimly closed in on it. Jared grabbed its belt buckle to pull his blade into its belly, as Scott grasped its shoulder and put the torch to its head, I flopped onto its legs and shoved the drill into the meat of its thigh.

When we were done, the interior of the truck was splashed with blood from all of us — but as we watched, the rot's body crumbled into dust. I turned to look at my companions.

Inside The Church of Vindicated Faith

A Post-Tribune Special Report
by Denise Renke
October 12, 1999

For months, an insular, secretive church has been meeting on Sundays in the AEM 6 cineplex. Unlike other churches, which engage in public evangelism, services at the Church of Vindicated Faith are open only to members — and membership is by invitation only.

Despite rumors about the Church, and investigation by police officials, the management of the AEM 6 continues to let the parishioners gather on Sunday mornings. Ramona Cisnaros, manager of the theater, defended her tenants staunchly.

"Point me to one thing the Church has done wrong," Cisnaros said. As far as I'm concerned, they're model tenants. No one's complained to me, they leave the theater clean when they're done, and they pay their rent on time. Maybe they don't worship like you or me, but I kind of thought that America was based on religious freedom."

Sheriff Jonas Frankle was less sanguine about the Church. "I've heard rumors about them," he said. "Rumors that they're talking a lot of crazy talk, and they may be working up to some crazy actions. They claim they're Christians, but I've heard there's a lot of noise about "enemies" and "demons" and "the corrupted ones" who have to be hunted down and "dealt with." Sure, there hasn't been a complaint... yet. But we know who's going to that theater on Sunday morning, and you can be sure we'll be watching close if they go near a family planning clinic or something."

Although no formal charges have been leveled against the Church itself, two of its members have been arrested for violating stalker laws. Both pled no contest.

It's likely that a criminal could be found in any congregation — but when two members of a tiny house of worship are arrested for the same crime within three months, tongues are bound to wag. The Church has always been extremely private — in some cases aggressively so.

This morning, I became the first outsider to witness a meeting of the Church of Vindicated Faith.

It wasn't easy: People were posted at both the interior doors to the theater and outside the exit doors. Even the entrances to the theater as a whole were patrolled. I, however, got into the building before church members arrived. A former employee had told me about a utility access above the theater's drop ceiling, and it was there that I waited for services to begin.

The catwalk was wide, but only three feet high (It's used for repairing the theater sound system). I had to crawl, and with every inch I could hear the supports shift and groan slightly. The only light was what came up in shafts from below, shining through cracks in their ceiling — my floor.

There seemed to be a lot of cracks, which is not a comforting thought when you're two stories up.

Pressing my eye to one of the largest cracks, I could see a segment of one aisle, plus some of the worshippers. Unlike many churches, most of the people were right up front. There was no music, no hymns, and only one brief reading — Job 29 and 30. I never saw the leader of the service, but his voice was loud, deep and powerful with unconditional belief.

After the reading, the leader asked for any new members to step forward and present themselves. There were two — a woman and a man. Hesitantly, they came toward the front. Compared to the leader's voice, theirs sounded weak and hesitant. They said their names were Bob and Mary Anne.

"Our boy," the woman said. "He's hurt — it's bad. He's in the hospital, and he won't wake up. The doctors have looked at him and done everything, and they say all we can do is wait."

There was an awkward silence, and then the man added, "He got hit by a car."

"I can heal your boy." This was a new voice — a woman's voice, high and clear and piercing, but with a note of warmth and pity.

"It's as she says." This was the leader again. "The injuries of the body are nothing to us, who have heard the voices of angels and are charged with healing the spirit of the world. We can — if you have faith. Christ the Son gave his body to save us. Are you, as parents, willing to give your souls to save your child?"

The couple didn't answer. They were up front, where I couldn't see them, but I could watch as the other church members leaned forward in their seats. It was almost like they were watching a movie.

"Have no doubt, the miracle you seek can be yours. No injury is beyond the power of the visible faith — but we will not cast our pearls before swine. You must pay for the health of your son, and the price will be hard."

Something about his voice, so arrogant, so utterly convinced, sent chills through my whole body.

"But do not fear! Our God is loving and merciful. The path is hard, but not cruel. The price is not something to fear, but something to embrace! I ask you to give your soul — but to give it to a righteous God, a God of salvation and purity!"

The church members were beginning to sway in their seats.

"Now is no time to doubt! Satan has arisen to annihilate the world! Beasts walk our streets in human form, while angels arm the just to destroy the adversary! The pleasing masks of the devil's minions crumble, and graves gape wide, testifying to the coming Judgment Day!"

His voice suddenly dropped, but was no less audible.

"We can save your boy, but we will not save his life only to watch his soul be damned. The war of Good against Evil is fast approaching, and we ask you to save yourself by joining the right side. Say you will, say you are God's soldiers, and salvation can be yours. Reject it — and your boy's suffering now will be only a shadow of your torment in the afterlife."

"Someone is watching us!"

This third voice was flat, nasal and cold. It was not loud, but once it was heard the leader fell silent, and the congregation followed suit immediately. From my perch I watched as a man wearing coveralls and tinted glasses walked slowly up the aisle. He stopped directly beneath me, and his head tilted straight back. I was peering through a crack that was a half-inch wide at most, yet I felt like he was looking directly into my eyes.

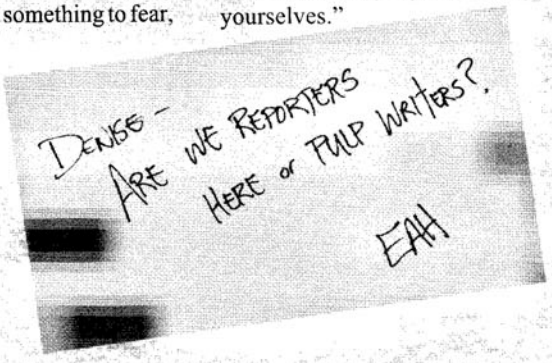
"Is it one of *them*? One of the devil's spawn?" One of the members had stood and drawn a gun from his coat. It was one of the few things that could have pulled my eyes away from the man below me. I was terrified — too frightened to even move.

"No. It's human." When the cold-voiced man spoke, I let out a long breath I hadn't been aware I was holding. I felt somehow that I had just been judged.

"Put that gun away, you idiot!" This was a woman's voice.

"Whoever it is, we want him alive." This was the first speaker. At his words, the congregation stood and began running up the aisles. I started back the way I'd come, bruising my knees on the metal catwalk. It was *me* they wanted alive, and *I* wanted to stay that way, too. The leader spoke the last words I heard said by any member of the Church of Vindicated Faith.

"Bob, Mary Anne — you have a chance to prove yourselves."



Scott had arterial bleeding from a gargantuan bite to his neck. So much blood was spurting out of his jugular that the deep gouges on his chest were barely bleeding. I applied direct pressure, but it was no good. He died within a minute. I think he was trying to say something, but I'll never know what it was.

Jared had been raked across the back, had been shot in the back of his leg, and both his wrists were bleeding. He had a handcuff bracelet on each wrist, but the chain between was broken. He must have broken the handcuffs somehow, cutting his skin in the process. The leg wound was bad; the bullet had broken his femur. He'd kept running on it somehow, compounding the fracture. I started applying a tourniquet when I saw flashing lights behind us, and heard sirens.

"He gonna live?" Jarvis yelled over his shoulder as he raced through the graying dawn.

"I don't know — he needs a hospital."

"I ain't going," Jared moaned. I jumped, startled. I'd assumed he was comatose. "Doc, we gotta... go back to the police station."

"That's insane! You're in critical condition!"

"You got that clinic, right? You can fix me up, right?"

"No, Jared—"

"Doc, if he goes to the hospital we go down with him," Jarvis proclaimed. Then he swore and wrenched the wheel around, taking us through a wooden fence and across a lawn. I think that's when the cops lost us.

"Doc, I put the trail on it — on the master! I can find him, just get me healed up!" Jared's eyes were wide, pleading. "Doc, you gotta save me!"

"I'm not a fucking miracle worker!"

His face was slick with blood and shiny with sweat. His crooked teeth were glaring white in a grimace or a smile.

"But you are, Doc. We all are."

Those were the dying words of Jared Shoemaker.

As a rule, I try not to curse. I consider swearing distasteful. But I swore constantly as I shoved Scott up toward the front seat. Jarvis was hysterical. I told him to stop at the top of a hill and jump out. I had to scream at him that Jared was dead, but we could still save ourselves. As I spoke, I emptied the gas tank of Scott's chain saw all over the back of the truck.

Jarvis did as I said. We jumped out and the truck coasted downhill into a lamppost. After the crash I had to set it on fire myself while Jarvis ran away. I think he'll be okay. He wasn't injured.

A man who came out of a house in response to all the noise found my gun pointed at his face. I was lucky. The highway was very close. I had him drive me a few exits west before we pulled over and I made him get out and give me his coat. Underneath, he was still in his pajamas. Hope the poor man doesn't catch pneumonia. I pointed the gun and he started running. Then I got back in the car and headed east. I took an exit at random, wiped the steering wheel and started walking. After a few blocks, I found a bus stop. I bandaged my torn face as well as I could, then pulled my scarf over it. By the time a few early commuters showed up, casual examination would have revealed a tired old man tightly bundled in an overcoat against the morning cold. I don't think anyone even looked.

October 26, 1999

My face is not healing at the accelerated rate that I've come to expect. That's a problem: I was relying on having an unmarked visage to show police if they accused me of the carjacking. It's my hope that the victim will be unable to give a coherent report. After all, he was seized and menaced by a blood-soaked man in the early morning. That's not conducive to accurate reporting.

Everything seems to be crumbling. Yesterday I discovered I'd been banned from the hunter list. I asked Lupe what was going on. She said she didn't want to talk about it on the phone. When I met her after work, she gave me a curious look. It had already been an exasperating day. I'd seen not one, but two stage magicians on daytime TV duplicating Jared's televised feats with standard stage legerdemain. Both programs made much of his criminal past and spectacular escape. Neither bothered to say that he had neither the experience nor the resources to create such elaborate illusions. Neither mentioned that he had never even been suspected of fraud before. No, it was all convenient tripe about PCP giving him the strength to break his handcuffs, and police being intimidated by mass hysteria. I'm surprised they didn't work swamp gas and a weather balloon into the story as well.

As for Scott, he has been slandered wickedly. I won't even repeat what they wrote about him. Scott's, however, is not the only savaged reputation. After looking at me closely, Lupe asked, "Is it true?" I naturally asked her what "it" was.

"The list said you're not a real doctor. It said you lost your license for experimenting on corpses, and that you work as a back-alley abortionist now. How much of that is true, Doc?"

It was difficult to know how to play it. With a name like "Guadalupe," it was likely that she was a Catholic of the most superstitious stripe. On the other hand, I've done more than one D&C on a devout Hispanic Catholic.

I couldn't read her, so I decided to gamble on the truth.

"Yes, I perform abortions. But before you picture me wickedly grinning over my bent coat hanger, let me assure you that I use safe, sterile procedures. I will not abort in the third trimester. And I retain my medical license. I was censured by the AMA, that is true. No hospital will hire me. But that doesn't mean I'm an unqualified butcher or some sort of pill-pushing 'Doctor Feelgood.'"

She narrowed her lips and turned her head. Then she asked if I knew what happened to Scott.

I couldn't risk alienating her further, so I said I did not know.

(Later.)

I tried calling Leaf and Oaken. Leaf hung up on me after spitting out some venomous claptrap about how she "always knew I was a patriarchal wannabe, objectifying the bodies of women into baby machines, fit to be switched on and off at will." Oaken called me back about a half-hour later. What he said was far more coherent, but no more reassuring.

"Doc, I think the list is falling apart."

"What do you mean?"

"Witness1 kicked a bunch of people off the list — not just you, but Bookworm and Hunter, too. Bookworm's started his own list, and there's a guy on it claiming he's the original Witness — that someone's taken over the list and is keeping him off it somehow. All kinds of accusations are flying around — that so-and-so set this other person up to die assaulting some creature habitat, that the... the whatever they were... were warned, you know?"

I had an ugly memory of Jared saying that something had hidden right in his car, unobserved. I thought of the invisibles that had come and gone in my home as they pleased, pausing only to torment me. What does a computer network rely on? Only passwords typed at a keyboard. Surely that was no great obstacle to unseen beings.

I relayed my fears to Oaken. He told me how to get in touch with Bookworm's list, but we both agreed that any

Dearest Brad,

I'm dead now. My executors gave you the key to my safety deposit box. Along with this letter, you have some money, fake IDs and my apology.

I'm sorry because I knew that I was going to die — to die horribly — and I didn't tell you. I'm sorry because I've been lying to you for months. And I'm sorry because, though you don't know it yet, I've ruined your life.

But first things first.

I never told you this, but I considered killing myself many times to keep my family safe from the truth about my orientation. I planned to drive off the road so it would look like an accident. In fact, when we met at that bar, I was trying work up the courage to do just that. You spilled your drink on me, and you thought I was upset because you'd ruined my jacket. You couldn't possibly have known how close I was to ending it all at that moment.

You apologized. We talked. By the end of the evening I was born again. You were the first person I ever met who I could be honest with, and with whom I could be myself. Even though it ended up costing me my wife and family, meeting you was the best thing that ever happened to me.

When I left Gloria, I swore I would never lie to you the way I lied to her. I see now that was only wishful thinking. We both secretly know that our relationship has been shrouded in half-truths — I have been living another life that you know nothing about.

There was no grant for my studies. There was no lecture circuit. I've been away so much lately because I've been killing monsters.

I've written and deleted that sentence 20 times. I've tried every approach I can think of and I've considered telling you something easier, but less true. In the end, I've decided I want to leave the world honestly, and it comes down to these words. I've been killing monsters.

With that statement I will live forever in your memory as a madman. Maybe, maybe if I had an entire book to dedicate to telling you what I have become, I could convince you otherwise. But I don't have that luxury. The reason I am writing this now is that I doubt I'll live to see morning. Tonight's kind of a final.

It started in July when my car was in the shop. I was coming home late on the bus. We had just turned onto 5th Avenue. You know what goes on there. In any case, I saw a boy get into a limousine a half-block up the street. The car pulled into traffic and the bus kept pace with it for a moment. The sun roof on the limo was open and I glanced inside as did several of other people on my side of the bus. I remember that the boy looked very young. I was disturbed by the situation. I looked away.

When I glanced back, I had new eyes. Time seemed to slow down and I saw things that had been hidden only a moment before. I saw the "John." Though I would have figuratively described him as a monster before, I now saw him that way — literally. He was horrible. That's all I can say of his appearance. I saw the monster open his mouth. I saw what he had for teeth. And I saw him lunge for the boy. Then, in that impossibly long moment, I realized I had a choice.

If it happened to you, you would undoubtedly have rationalized things in religious terms. I know it's important for you to believe in that. I personally suspect I somehow made contact with a more primal aspect of myself, as if my id had been silently standing back my whole life. When I saw the "monster," this race memory — the id guardian — came to the forefront of my mind, with wisdom and weapons.

This sounds ridiculous, but I've come to believe there was a time in our past when humans competed with another species. I believe we won that war, but the skills we used atrophied and remained dormant in only some of us. Some of the enemy survived, though, and they hide among us. My id guardian seemed to activate when I saw one of these creatures. It offered me options.

Regardless of the "whys," I made my choice and ran to the front of the bus. I grabbed the wheel and forced the bus to smash into the limousine.

The monster and I fought. (I know that makes you laugh — to think of me raising my hand in anger. You wouldn't have believed it.) It was cold. My skin crawls at the thought even now. Killing it was the most terrifying thing I've ever done, but that's what I did.

I wasn't arrested and there was nothing in the news. I have theories about all that but, like I said, time is short.

I eventually found others like myself. We've been digging deeper into the nest that spawned that first monster. As it happens, he was rather young and weak compared to the others. There's going to be a final fight tonight. If I die and they identify me, you'll be in danger. Use the fake IDs to get away. I wish I could have left you more money, but I've spent all the rest on this.

I know you don't love me, Brad — not really. You used me to get a better life, but I don't mind. Your presence, regardless of your intentions, gave me a better life as well. We used each other.

I love you Brad. I'm glad you spilled your drink on my jacket.

Jim

information from either list should be considered with a grain of salt.

I asked him if we could meet face to face, and he said he didn't think so. I asked him if it was Leaf. Although he didn't say specifically, I have no doubt that she was the barrier between us.

Damn.

October 28, 1999

When I came home today there were at least eight invisibles waiting for me. A few held placards. One read, "Help me find my baby!" Another was, "I cannot rest until I'm forgiven." I tried to pretend I didn't see them, but they swarmed around me, shoving their pathetic signs and grieving visages in my face. It was more than I could take. I screamed, grabbed the fireplace poker and swung it wildly, "striking" several, and then fled for my car. Luckily, none of them got in with me. I started the engine and just drove.

I don't know what I'm going to do. All the "imbued" I know are either dead or have sworn off my company, permanently. My house is infested with ghosts I cannot personally harm. I've broken some serious laws and have nothing to show for it but an agonizing facial injury — that and the knowledge that the unnatural is far more powerful and pervasive than I had ever dared to fear.

My impulse is to run to Rebecca. I have been alone for so long. What's that old saying? "Family means that they have to take you back"?

But she'd never believe me without proof — and if the invisibles follow me to her, she would have no defense.

If that's the price of proof, and of some momentary comfort, then it is too high.

No. I won't be home for the holidays.

The Journal of Lucimal

All my life, I have sought to shed my human limits. Today, I have succeeded. Today my old, weak self is slain. I will speak that name no longer. Today I am born again, more than human. Today I am a demon. Today I war with God.

Call me Lucimal.

One day my name will be known to all, when I have overcome all opposition and enthroned myself as Lord of All Worlds. The battle will be long and hard, but there is no room for fear in the heart of Lucimal. There is no room for doubt or compassion or any other human weakness. There is room only for grandeur, for power, for sacred treachery. There is room only for self.

My old self studied the occult arts for years, in a weak, doubting and uncertain way. My new self mastered them in an instant. All my efforts had led me merely to the fringes, and there I watched, cowering.

Then I heard the Voice. Then I saw as demons see. Then I fought as demons fight.

It was a lesser demon I killed that day — some imp of earthly torment, fit only to feast on mere humans. I shall have better prey than that. I shall eat the hearts of demon kings!

I was not the only one the Voice gifted with the powers of Hell. To one was given a flaming sword, like that of Malik the guardian. Another had a voice like Metatron, fit to subdue any spirit that hears. But I was given the grasp of Nergal, given the swirling mists of death to command against my demon brethren.

The others are fools. They do not understand what has happened to them. The woman with the sword of Malik, her name is Joan. She thinks her powers came from "God" and were given to her to fight "evil." A simpleton. For me, for a man of learning, the Voice was clearly uninterested in such frail, hollow concepts as "good and evil." Once the wool comes off your eyes, it's obvious that there is no good, that this world is evil and that all within it are either honestly corrupt or deluded pawns of evil beings with greater intelligence. I'll kill her first, when she's no longer useful.

I do not know who the Voice was — Semyaza? Harut or Marut? It doesn't matter. What matters is this: The demon natures of humanity are being awakened, and only I know what it truly means.

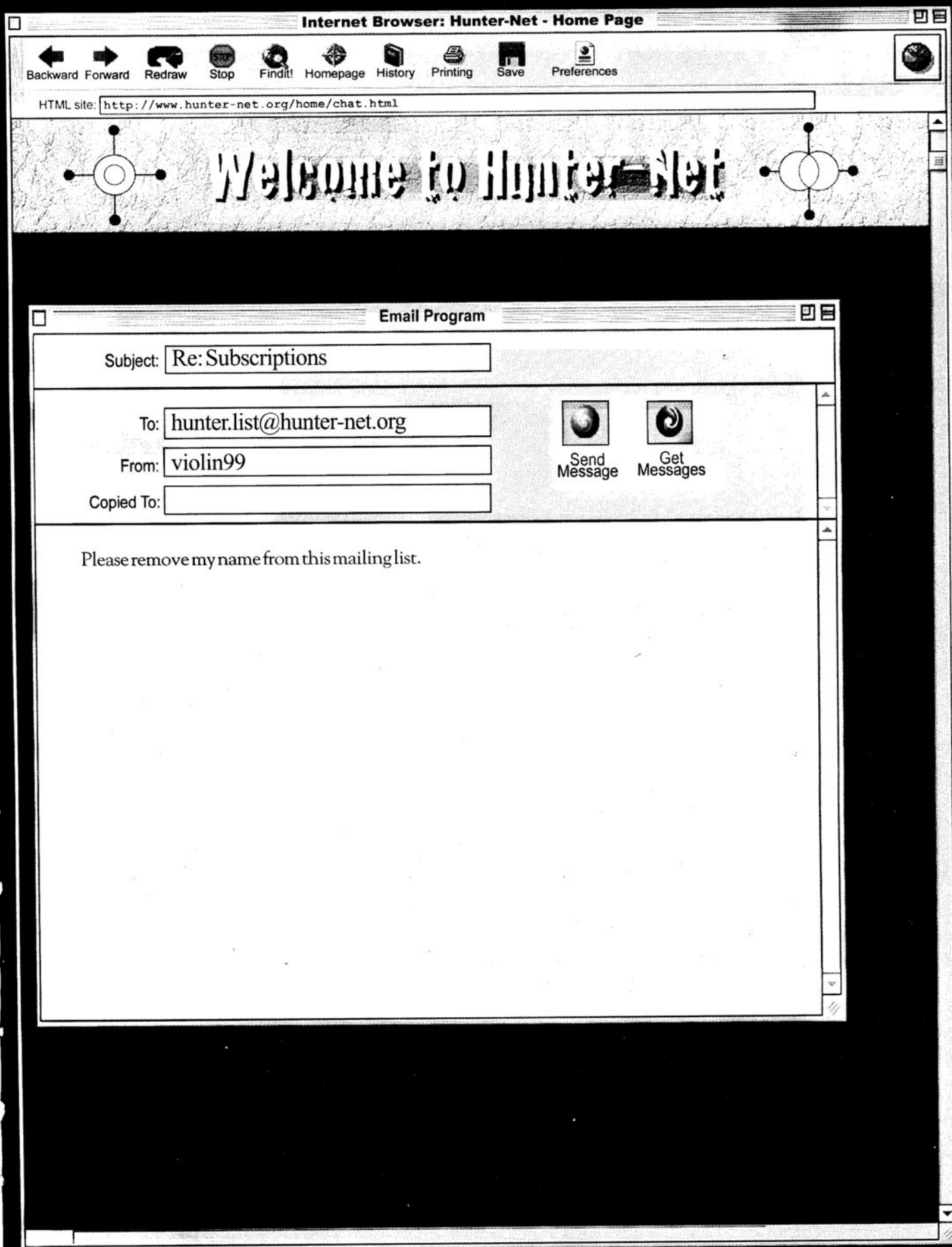
The end is at hand. The Apocalypse — the final great war of all against all — is approaching, and the lords of darkness are hedging their bets. Only one being can stand atop this shattered world. Currently it may be Satan or Iblis or Zyras the Unjust — it doesn't matter, for I have not yet amassed the power to challenge it. By the time I do, a new master will likely have deposed it. I must time my actions carefully. It is always the great ruler who attracts poisonous envy. I must be the last conqueror, the one who attacks from secret when the others have all wasted their strength.

That is the plan of the Voice, too. If you can't win the current fight, change the rules. If the Satanic throne is too well guarded, create an army of mortal dupes to weaken the powers of hell. Most of these "imbued" will no doubt fight the good fight against the demons, unaware whose ends they serve. Most will also die. Some will become mighty warriors, drinking the death of their demon foes and taking their unholy strength. These few will take the fight directly to the gate of hell itself, and while the Lord of Flames is occupied, the Voice plans to strike from concealment, remove the weakened ruler and take his place. If the Voice can continue to fool the pawns into defending it, it will. Otherwise, their own exhaustion will make them easy prey to its power.

Only someone who knows the truth of the matter has any hope of survival. Only one proud enough to kill, ruthless enough to devour, wise enough to wait and wicked enough to betray.

Only I. Only the Torch of Evil.

Only Lucimal.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Subject:
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To:
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violin99
Copied To:
Send Message
Get Messages
Please remove my name from this mailing list.

CHAPTER 2: A WORLD OF DARKNESS (SETTING)

Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.
— Exodus 32:10

Introduction

by Dictatrix11

Over the past several months, there has been a call on hunter-net to establish a collection of material to aid novice hunters in their calling. In particular, newcomers have requested material on the truth of the shadows, and on the habits and influences of the creatures at large around us. Builder50 and I have volunteered to compile what we know, a combination of instruction and guidance for new hunters. Both of us feel we have the experience and foundation to make such a document worthwhile. It is a combined effort, with a shared voice.

Our acceptance of this responsibility has not been welcomed by all members of hunter-net. The community is rather divided, and some take extremely divergent stands on the nature of the hunter condition. Yet the internet is built on the principle of a marketplace of ideas, so Builder50 and I have decided to proceed with our work despite objections. Others have claimed that they too prepare their own resources. Excellent. Doing so frees their voices of committee demands, and from the oppression of outside influences.

This file contains a great deal of opinion and conjecture. Little here is irrefutable, and if any is, it could change tomorrow. This is a reference, not a bible. Builder50 and I do not agree on several issues, and you may not agree with either of us. What we can say honestly is that we are both experienced at the calling, and neither of us is as foolish as our email detractors would have you believe. Take what you can from our work and apply it to your own experience. If you can improve upon or revise this document substantially, do so, but maintain a history of revisions intact. In the future, people might locate multiple, differing revisions of this document. Please try to maintain each version's intellectual origins.

Part 1: What It's Like Out There

If you are reading this, you have made the same error I have, the worst of your life. Hunting is a foolish thing to do. Only fools do it. Turn your back now and return to your former life.

If you remain, perhaps what you are about to read will change your mind. If not, perhaps it will teach you enough to accomplish some good before you fall. From what I have witnessed, most who answer our calling make crucial errors and die quickly. And yet, not everyone does. I have pursued this mission for some time, and am still here. I write this article in hopes that some of you will survive as well. Please pay attention.

My origins are unimportant. I am well educated, I began investigating our subjects out of sympathy rather than repulsion, and sufficient people consider me learned to endorse my contributions to this project. That said, please take care with the information herein. Your life has taken a deadly new direction. If you reveal or abuse what you learn here, you put yourself and all of our kind at risk.

There are some basic things that you must understand. Do not mislead yourself. Monsters *do* run the world. They always have. Perhaps they always will. That's the first, last and most important lesson that you must learn.

If you are determined to confront the unknown, you forfeit your life. Many of us die. Your future may be brief and grim. Rather than dwell on that, accept it and attempt to accomplish all you can in the time you have left. Concentrate on the secrets you can learn and on the unforgivable things that you can dispense with while you still breathe. It's better to remain positive in the face of even the worst fate.

You undoubtedly know that creatures can kill you, or do even worse things. If they were small and weak and metaphors for human failings, they would never show their faces. But they are not small or weak. They are large and strong and hold the night in a steel grip. It is quite possible that you will face a monster directly at some time, likely as a result of a mistake. Perhaps you will live, perhaps not. I've seen a corpse crush a man's skull. If you must be in the clutches of a determined enemy, let it be in the service of others — people whom you can save or fellow imbued whom you can preserve.

But the fact that monsters are physically powerful is actually inconsequential. My purpose is not to teach you how to fight. The reason I write is to share the results of research conducted by myself and my associates. We have delved into the truths of the world, created by monsters while we slept. Unlike information on surveillance or assassination — which, sadly, is widely available — this instruction may not exist anywhere else. I am an authority on the truth, if I may say, and I must share that knowledge. More importantly, it is likely that this website will have a short life span. It may have been invaded already. Thus, it is unlikely that I will update this document, so I will try to speak plainly. I choose not to compromise myself or my allies by remaining in contact.

To start, I must dispel your illusions. Put aside notions that you are some kind of protagonist, the character of a novel or film. This is not an American movie. It is true that we have been given special powers, but there is no evidence that the imbued are immortal or protected from the laws of nature. Indeed, we die all too easily.

History is filled with geniuses, brilliant generals, great leaders and magnificent athletes. They are all dead now. I've seen other imbued die. Many of you have. In my life in another country, before I was granted my powers, I saw many heroes die protecting spouses, children and homes. Their efforts were noble, but absolutely fruitless. I only hope to be so noble in my eventual failure.

We are humans. We do not dress up in brightly colored costumes, fight the supernatural, and emerge unscathed. This is not children's entertainment. We are simply people, stronger than we used to be and with special powers, but people nevertheless.

Consider that truth. A term I've heard for hunting is the "Most Dangerous Game." That is a lesson in and of itself. In that story, the prey turns upon the hunter. Do not expect the story to be different simply because *you* are the hunter. You will die or be injured horribly in the course of your mission. Perhaps you will be enslaved by them, or will live your remaining days imprisoned or as a "patient" in a psychiatric ward. Your family and loved ones could be killed, raped, tortured or subjected to unjust confinement. Your belongings could be confiscated by the government on false charges. Understand:

This will happen to you. *It* cannot *be escaped.*

The single greatest failing of the human mind is that we cannot believe that we will be the victim. Everything happens to the "other person." Whether you accept it or not, all of us are the other person. No one is untouchable, except perhaps some of the creatures we face. If you are careful and intelligent, you might survive a long time. But sooner or later, you will be hurt or killed. If you cannot cope with that knowledge, abandon this cause now.

The second misapprehension to correct is that the beings who have changed us are beyond reproach. If they could be trusted completely, they would not have invested us with such powers and turned us free with such baffling instruction. The enemy of our enemy is *not* necessarily our ally. Our creators may simply wield us like a weapon — a gun — that they use safely from a distance.

I would not be surprised to learn that the Messengers were monsters themselves or the creation of yet another faction that we have not yet encountered. Yes, our pursuit of the hunt can be rewarding for its own sake — in the good we accomplish — but reward is fleeting. Even if we rescued all those creatures who would be saved and destroyed the rest, what would our new role become? Are we truly that different from those whom we face? I have no answers, other than to advise you to cherish the people you know and to use what resources are available to you today. They may not exist tomorrow.

The third lesson to learn is that we cannot expose people at large to the truth. We will not defeat the enemy and ride into the sunset. There is no indication that monsters are new. Indeed, *we* appear to be, while the creatures have always been here.

Consider that, before you learned about monsters, the ordinary world you lived in was itself a fabric of lies. Drugs, homosexuality, religious extremism, organized crime, sexual assault, domestic violence — conditions that western society abhors — all existed. You may have even known people involved in such activities or who belonged to such taboo groups. Yet society as a whole overlooked or dismissed these conditions and people. Why? Because humanity prefers appearance to reality. We favor form over function. People overlook or ignore unpleasantness if it conflicts with the worlds we create for ourselves. Attempt to debate politics with a person who considers herself part of an ideological movement. When you point out the flaws of her belief system, she either ignores them or becomes defensive rather than admits to errors in judgment. Now attempt to tell the same person that her reality as a whole is a lie, and that monsters exist.

Ordinary people cannot accept reality as we know it because they cannot conceive of it, and have never been allowed to. Every systematic ideology in the world serves the secret agenda of the creatures. They watch us constantly. Whenever a group of people pulls together for a common purpose, one of them almost certainly receives orders from a creature, or is actually a monster in disguise.

In politics, for example, the first governments all served gods through priestly hierarchies. Is it difficult to suppose what those "gods" truly were? Imperialism was predicated on silencing the people while the authorities assumed control. Feudalism seemed to place the authorities on a level approaching the commoner's, but that proximity simply made it easier for the predators to herd their cattle. Anyone who is nostalgic for a strong leader is a cow longing for the comfort of the slaughter yard.

Now capitalism rules the world. It too is nothing but an efficient system by which the monsters rule us. In the United States, perhaps 95% of the wealth is controlled by 5% of the population. Is this equitable? Is this freedom? I say not. It is simply a way for modern predators to hide among their prey, possessing all the goods and food and demanding work in return. Feudalism was no different. We can only hope that there are *some* humans among the controlling minority.

We imbued are not immune to infiltration or monsters' wiles, either. The rifts that wrack hunter-net and its network of trust are just what you could fear most. We organize and they infiltrate. They always do. Here, we are their prey, despite what we can do. If we were just fighting the risen dead — the thoughtless ones — our cause would be clear. But they mislead us with false information, and perhaps even pose as us, turning us against each other. And, of course, *they* have prepared the world with convenient lies, so we fight against them, their willing servants, their legions of pawns, and humanity's collective thought itself.

And yet, our prison is not such because monsters have placed every brick. Humanity has allowed it to happen. As we are individuals, we are a group. Our societies are so preoccupied with appearances that we overlook substance. We would rather blame a woman for her own sexual violation than admit that others act in a brutal and inhuman fashion. With its head in the sand, human culture will never open its eyes and witness inhuman oppression. If you think you can wake the giant, you are living in its fairy tale. We will not tear away the veil. Simply because we have been made to see does not mean the rest are eager to follow suit.

If you wanted to spread your message, how would you? The creatures that rule from the shadows control the media. Reporting to newspapers or television stations means sticking your head in the noose. They *wait* for you. I am surprised that the person who was killed in Chicago survived long enough to appear on television. Perhaps the creatures there allowed him to play his hand in some plot of their own? New media and technologies are not necessarily our answer, either. The opposition is well educated, too. There is every reason to believe that some *very* sophisticated spiders crawl the web, searching for keywords related to the world of the unseen.

And if your sermon is heard, what happens then? Many proselytizers, from religious fanatics to militant forces to political parties, shout their causes. Here in the United States, there are other groups, such as alien believers and conspiracy theorists. You know the "truth" and can save the lives of millions, but so can everyone who seeks to perpetuate his agenda.

The common people are deafened by those who shout their particular versions of the truth. Indeed, supernatural forces and their underlings may pay *much* closer attention to the clamor than does the general public. The only good that is likely to come from speaking publicly is luring out those who listen too attentively. Perhaps you can dispose of them before they dispose of you. Not the wisest of strategies, but better than some.

8 August 1991

Nizni Kolkmst

Russia

Dear Pen Pal

I am very sad today but everyone else here is very happy the reason is that one of the men in the village hit and killed a wolf with his truck it was an accident but there was a big party anyway. My grandmother says we have always had parties to celebrate dead wolves but the celebrations have gotten bigger since the government started offering an extra high price on wolf furs.

At the party everyone stood around and yelled at the dead wolf "wolf do not be angry with us it was not us who killed you the russians are the ones who destroyed you"

Now the dead wolf is going to Moscow

Your friend

Milena Babenko

Another common misconception of the newly imbued is that monsters act alone. They do not. In fact, they surround themselves with institutions and build power. One of our counterparts may found a cult, an organization or a business. The creature then presents itself as a human being and earns the trust necessary to take what it wants from recruits, whether it be wealth, blood or souls. People in general are community beings. We submit to the authorities that make the correct verbal and physical gestures. Careful observers of our species can exploit those weaknesses. Maybe their predecessors instructed ours to do so. Regardless, rather than existing independent of one another, our opponents use human expectations to hide all the worst evils.

The most ambitious predators shape our very civilizations to their purposes. There is evidence to suggest that governments across the world are played by supernatural forces. The magnitude of such a concept is stunning. Could the futility of our future be any more clear? If we are to save the world, we must do more than merely undermine the ancient and powerful monsters hidden within our societies, cultures and civilizations.

We must exact such dramatic and tremendous change that the very structure of human society is altered. We must create a world that can survive without the figureheads at the top of the order. And we must do so now. For our children. For ourselves. If we do not begin the fight, the short time we have to plan may be forfeit, and we shall all remain enslaved.

Here is a simple caution to consider: If you ever consider a social cause too important or too valuable to be subjected to honest but harsh criticism, you have let yourself become the instrument of evil. Only by constant examination can we locate the source of ideas and actions. The moment you accept anything as unquestionable, you create a lair for something that we should hunt. That is true of *every* cause: religious liberty, freedom of speech, national security, the environment, human rights, gender rights. In a world full of horrors determined to destroy us, everything we are can be turned against us. Only in questioning and investigating are we safe.

Inhuman menaces don't simply hide among people you dislike or condemn. They hide among *us*, whatever the "we" is to which you belong. Slogans do the devils' work.

Thus, the notion of a lone monster struggling with its own existence is so prevalent and so deeply rooted in us that it must be the result of centuries of diligent work by creatures. Builder elaborates by explaining that in almost all stories involving the supernatural, creatures are portrayed as individuals. The monsters are symbols of anxiety for challenges to the social order. The vampire Dracula is said to have challenged Victorian sexual taboos. The "Big Bug" films of the 1950s reflected the fears of the Nuclear Age, of science without control.

Builder states, "In the end of such stories, the challenge is apparently defeated, or not. The forces of light vanquish the menace, or the symbolic society collapses beneath the power of the threat. Our entire perception of supernatural creatures is shaped by this story-pattern. From the Minotaur and Grendel to Dracula and Hannibal Lecter, we are taught to think of monsters as unique, discreet elements, singular threats against the natural or social order, things to be overcome through the action of the guardians of that established order.

"This view could not possibly be any more incorrect. There is plenty of evidence that there are a *lot* of rots, and that they have an organized society. A limited "hive-mind" is a possibility. I'm even willing to concede that the inter-rot conflicts we've observed could be faked by a true hive-mind to mislead us. There are also *other* things out there beyond rots and their puppets, things that we have no reason to believe to be related to the walking dead, and they all seem to work together, too.

"Whatever animosities may exist among the enemy, there is an organized and highly effective conspiracy by almost every recognizable supernatural organization to distort, conceal and destroy information about the world of the unseen. Creatures of the night mobilize quickly to neutralize threats to their community. While I have no idea if the various communities share information, there is abundant evidence of incidental cooperation. For example, rots will move Heaven and Earth to destroy evidence of skinchanger activities, even if a skinchanger pursues an aggressive campaign against the walking dead. Likewise, the "government agents" that some imbued report encountering seem intent on destroying evidence of the supernatural threat rather than neutralizing the threat itself.

"The world of the unseen is not made up of monsters from a vampire flick. There *are* lone wolves, but the average stalker of

from PEH IS FOR PARAGUAY

© 1953 by Hugo N. Levy

When I arrived in the swamplands of Paraguay, I could see why the old Nuremberg monsters I tracked chose the place. The country was naturally isolated — cut off from even the sea — and had never been adequately mapped. When it wasn't at war with all of its neighbors, it slept in total isolation.

The spider-girls, the weavers of Itagua and Asunción, had woven a lacy shroud around the country — a "lapacho curtain" — where the experiments had begun again. As I would learn during my brief stay, Hell didn't die in 1945. It just learned to speak Guarani.

the night is a member of a society as complex and orderly as our own. It's a society that takes care of its own and shields them from a hostile outside world. A society that has tremendous pull in the daylight world. Your hunts may never be investigated officially by the police, but they will certainly be *looked into*. And not only is it likely that your investigators will have supernatural abilities, they're quite likely to have full access to modern forensics technology. If you take on your prey like it was the monster in a horror novel, expect a visit from the rot goon squad."

PART 2: HOW IT REALLY WORKS

by Builder50

Dictatrix11 has conceded the writing chores to me given my experience with the following subject matter.

THE POLICE

I want to talk about the police first because they are the very first thing you need to worry about as a hunter. All the rest of the organizations I go over in this section tend to mind their own business unless kicked into motion. The police are out there looking for trouble.

To start, let me say this plainly so that nobody forgets, because it takes some getting used to:

You are a violent criminal.
You commit violent criminal acts.
The police are not your friends.

By hunting, you commit crimes, the very acts which the police exist to oppose. Even if you never ever fuck up and get nabbed by the cops, the rots and God knows what else have their fingers into the heat in a big way. Go figure. Chances are, if you get spotted and IDed while on the job, you will receive a visit from the local copper, who may not stop at arresting you. So here's the truth about cops.

Most Cops Are Not Nice People. Cops have to take shit from people day after day. They get insulted, spit on, shot at — and then there's the criminals to deal with. Police have to face the dregs of society, they get no respect and, as far as jobs where people regularly try to whack you go, the pay is terrible. The good parts of being a cop are that you can wear a uniform, carry a gun, beat the crap out of people, and otherwise be an Authority Figure.

The fact that this terrible job is voluntary means that cops are the kind of people for whom the good parts of the job outweigh the bad (control freaks, bullies and borderline sadists), or they're from cop families for whom there's only one career choice. The first kind start off bad and get worse. The second kind have usually been shielded from the realities of the machine by their parents. By the time they're disillusioned, they're not that much better than the power maggots. Forget the exceptions — you're worried about what you'll *probably* have to deal with. Rest assured that police officers have not passed up careers in high finance or network administration to walk a beat. The closet poets or detectives who do the crossword in ink exist only on TV.

What's that mean to you? When you're faced with a cop, showing anything other than groveling deference is likely to provoke harassment or violence.

Don't believe me? You haven't met enough cops. Every cop you meet has the ability to send you to jail for something made up. He can just plant the evidence on you. And let's not forget what you *really did*. Can you risk trusting them? Planted evidence and "drop pistols" happen all the time, and don't forget that you actually *are* a criminal. You may think of yourself as a heroic crusader, but the cops don't care *why* you're standing over that body and holding a smoking gun. The only people who give a fuck are you and the monsters. Remember the monsters, the ones that pull the strings of the precinct captain whose undead pal you whacked last week? Yeah, them.

Most Cops Are Not Honest. Bullies and disillusioned idealists have one thing in common: the understanding that there will never be an end to crime. Right after the realization that corruption is inevitable comes the acceptance that if you can't hope to stomp out evil, you might as well charge it rent.

How many cops are on the take? Generally, all the ones the enemy needs to fuck with you, and never the one *you* need. That said, don't underestimate the divine magic of greed. Carry a couple thousand bucks — cash — on you. If you get bagged doing a job, you're going to the station. We know rots have ties to the police. We know that rots can mindfuck people. We know the imbued have a real problem surviving to see trial. It's safe to assume that if you're caught waxing a rot, or while on the dodge from another job, it's a death sentence. You might as well try to bribe your way out.

Maybe the cop will refuse it and turn you in. Maybe he'll take it and turn you in anyway. Maybe he'll take it, shoot you, plant a drop piece and walk away several thousand bucks richer. What's the difference, really? If you get nabbed, you're almost certainly dead, and a death sentence doesn't get any worse because you tried to buy your way out of it. Maybe, just maybe, Officer Friday will look the other way while you haul ass.

Most Cops Do Not Give a Shit. Unless you fuck with them, they get an easy chance to fuck with you, or they otherwise get a hair up their collective ass, most cops don't really give a goddamn. People who commit crimes tend to be of below-average education. Seventy percent of all murders are committed by a relative, close friend or someone intimate

with the deceased. Typically, the murderer stands over the body, gibbering or otherwise doing a poor job of coping with the situation. Ultimately, crime is pretty predictable.

Most investigators are interested in working the common (and usually profitable) angles. It's certain that you'll have to break the law in the course of your career as a hunter. As long as you keep your head on straight, stay lucky and don't make a hobby of it, you can probably get away with a certain amount of criminal activity on the strength of perfunctory investigations. The estimated 225 active serial killers in the United States can't be wrong. If you don't commit crimes for conventional reasons, you probably won't be caught until you make a monumental error.

All this assumes, of course, that the monsters don't link their dead friends to your actions. The police are not inept by nature, just by inclination. If you get them motivated, they can and will get an awful lot smarter. If you just whack some hooker or John Doe, the cops won't bother with a door-to-door. But your targets aren't usually hookers or John Does. They're members of a powerful subculture with a lot of pull. Other than dead cops, nothing makes police smart faster than pressure from those who can give the department serious grief. If the mayor or a couple state representatives call the chief of police to express outrage about a murder, there will be door-to-door canvassing, artists' renditions and forensics teams crawling all over the crime scene.

The Underworld

When you say underworld, people's minds immediately jump to dark Italian restaurants, Japanese guys with missing fingers or Hong Kong triads with cutting-edge technology. All evidence seems to indicate that these folks are just thick with rots, or at least their puppets.

Organized crime is, well, organized. It's involved in high-overhead operations like extortion, protection rackets, counterfeiting, fraud, contract murder, prostitution, pornography, bid rigging and illegal waste disposal. As it happens, these sorts of operations suit power-hungry monsters. If the police are rots' mailed right fist, then mobsters are the left hand with the poisoned dagger. If you're too clean and well-heeled for the cops to drag down, you can probably expect a visit from Nicky and Jocko. They'll do the same thing to you as the cops, but instead of interrogating you in a police-station holding cell, it'll be in an empty warehouse.

Everything said about cops goes for organized crime, but criminals don't have to make a pretense of impartiality. You mess with their interests, they retaliate. That's how they operate, even if they're not controlled by rots or some other monster. In most cases, organized crime already has its fingers in the local pie; in such environs, monsters may not need to cover their tracks. And when officers investigating the scene of your kneecapping hear your description of Nicky and Jocko, their eyes will glaze over and that will be the end of that.

Never forget that in a lot of really poor places, *criminals* are the law. There are a lot of places the police just don't go. In a lot of other places, the residents would rather call up the gang they pay protection money to because the crooks'll do less harm than the cops. Criminal authorities don't have crime labs, these folks care about their jobs more than the local heat does, and they don't need to worry about evidence or building a case or any of that crap. Crooks don't send you to jail, they send you to the hospital or the morgue. If you commit crimes in the wrong place, the pigs may be the least of your worries.

However, the underworld doesn't consist solely of guys who eat too much ethnic food and say things like, "The boss is wounded by your disrespect." There's a whole world of dime-store criminals and cut-rate thugs on the streets. Hookers, pimps, palookas, heavies, second-string pushers, chop-shop owners, fences, con artists, gangstas and pachucos are the scum of society, the losers in the game of life. Honest citizens see these people and their eyes just slip across them. In and out of jail, perpetually under investigation, most of this ecology of failure lives below the poverty line. The fish in this pond are minnows compared to even minor organized-crime figures. These are the lives that end frozen to death on a sidewalk, bleeding in an alley over a bad deal, or floating face-down, bled white by a rot. Whether they go to the local pauper's field or up the chimney of the morgue, nobody mourns.

Obliviousness to these people is further evidence of the blindness Dictatrix discussed earlier. As a society, we pretend these walking wounded don't exist, even though everyone knows one or two or ten of them. It's only after you slip beneath the surface of legitimacy that you realize how worm-eaten our society is. Once you realize how much of the orderly world is an illusion, created by us as reassurance that things happen to the *other* guy, the world is never the same again. This is your world now. This is where the monsters feed.

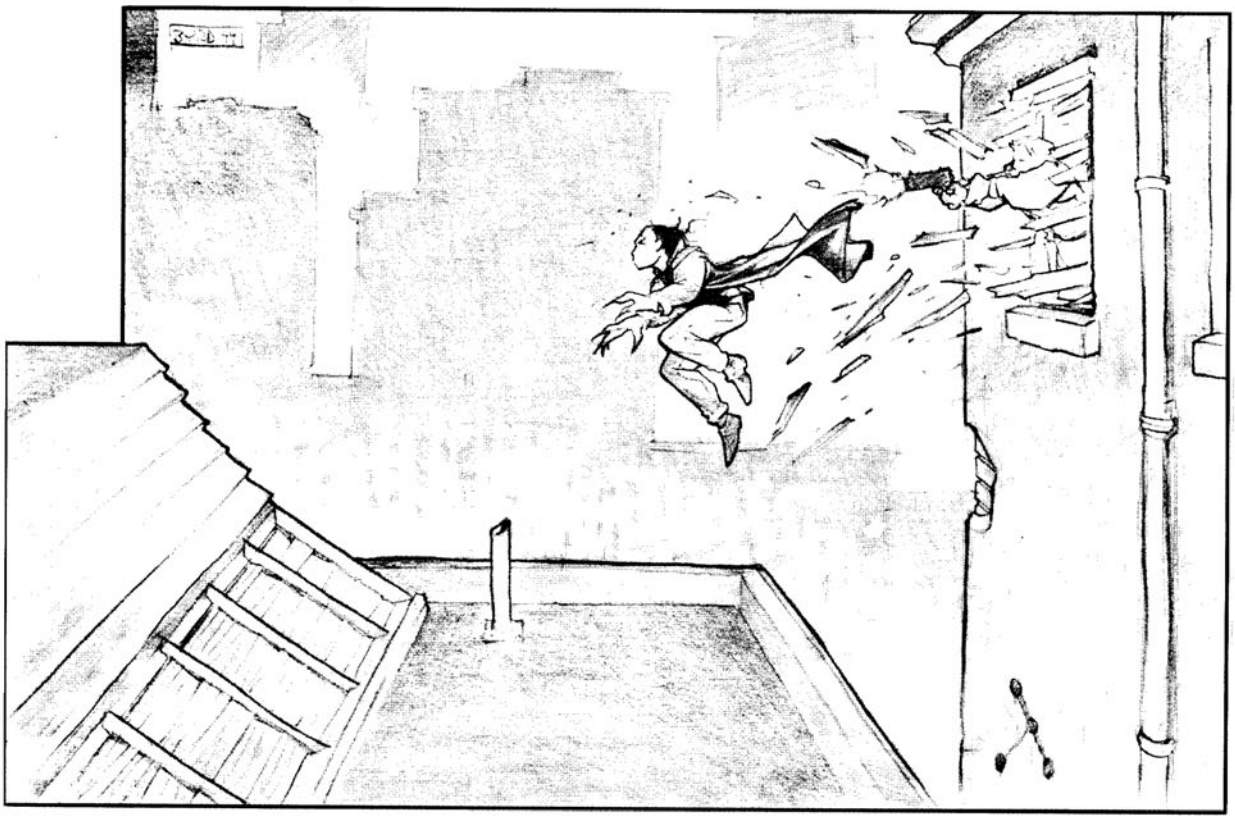
Paradoxically, the "low people" have the most awareness of the way the world really works. Because they're the bottom of the barrel, below the law, monsters relax around them and let their masks slip. Is it any coincidence that so much magic and superstition filters up from the ghetto? Charms against the creatures of the night are not ignorance on the part of peasants or the poor, but desperate attempts at protection from what they realize is all too real.

But just because the enemy lowers its guard around the bottom feeders doesn't mean the drudges aren't being watched. This is where the monsters come to feed and play. This is their herd. If you pop some pimp or whack a two-bit hood, understand that you might fuck with someone's lunch. Do it too many times and someone will notice.

The Media

The one thing night creatures want more then *anything* is secrecy. Given that they have magic powers and have spent all of recorded history playing this game, there's little doubt that media organizations are under their control. The average reporter isn't under the direct influence of monsters any more than the average beat cop is. But as with the police, if you look up the chain of command past the stringers and camera crews, you notice that the desk editors and producers are thick with puppets and Renfields. Someone has to decide how to spin news stories and give them the final green light.

And if coverage of local news is tight, then national coverage is a vise. The truth can be stopped or altered at a variety of levels. Not only does a local affiliate have to call a



national news desk and offer to sell footage, the news desk has to buy it and decide to air the story as anything other than a 30-second humor piece. Likewise, stringers can call a story in until they're hoarse, but if the wire services don't pick it up, it's nothing more than local news.

Weekly local papers and 'zines may operate independently of the conspiracies, but they're voices in the wilderness. Major media outlets pass up their stories if they're too close to the truth, witnesses become unreliable or vanish, or the publication may even be bought out for a large sum and "editorially redirected." Using media to blow the lid off the unseen is a big mistake — as big as believing that monsters act alone. It's playing exactly the game they want you to.

More than just a brick wall to your efforts, mass media is a trap for the incautious hunter. So you uncovered evidence of monsters that you want to distribute? Logic says give or sell it to the national media. So you talk to the local desk editor or executive producer. She thanks you, buys the material, buries it and makes a call to *the master*. That's when you have an accident. Maybe the cops stop you for dangerous driving and happen to find an eightball of coke. Maybe you suddenly can't remember what you saw. Maybe you just disappear. Whatever the case, you stop being a problem.

Glory Hole

THAILAND J-1201 Let me fulfill all your secret needs! I am Kopsaak, age 11, and I am very clean and very skilled. I have been dead 71 years.

Stay away from the media. At best, it's useless and draws attention to you. At worst, it's like tying a ribbon around your neck and delivering yourself to your enemies' door. There are a lot less of us than there are of them, and they have more friends. Going to the media intent on "flushing them out" is like turning on a flashlight in a dark room that's full of men with guns. The only way someone else is going to get hurt is by a bullet that's already passed through you. There are better ways to die.

Business

With their ages-old conspiracies to control government and law enforcement, monsters would be remiss if they didn't control commerce as well.

Even if monsters ignored business' potential, it would naturally fall in line with the beasts' agenda. A company's purpose is to turn a profit. Going along with the powers that be is profitable. Rocking the boat leads to loss and failure. For every Oskar Schindler there are a hundred Henry Fords. It is therefore the nature of the corporate beast to accommodate amorality, to adapt to conditions in an effort to assume a maximally profitable configuration.

But we have gathered enough evidence to suggest that there is much more than incidental collaboration at work. As

in other sectors of human endeavor, monsters stand in the corporate shadows, backing their pawns and proxies. Not surprisingly, the chance to gain profit draws them out in great numbers. Why shouldn't our predatory rulers, the princes of the night, live well off the sweat of our brow?

I suggest that those of you in the business world quickly learn to master your emotions. You will shortly become aware of a panoply of interests who pull the strings behind our daily stock reports. Better that you control your reactions. Rots, puppets, wolfmen and degenerate things throng the corridors of commerce on every level.

CNN Transcript

Louis Stuart, CNN Anchor, Atlanta: And now with an update on the Sierra Leone situation is Kitty Thomas from Freetown. Kitty?

Kitty Thomas, CNN Correspondent, Freetown, Sierra Leone: Thanks, Louis. The situation here in the capital tonight is degenerating almost minute-by-minute. I'm not sure how long I have before we should get to cover. There are at least a dozen rebel bands moving through the city now. According to reports, they're executing all supporters of the Vincente government left in the capital. There are rumors of blood-drinking and worse, Louis — much worse than anything we saw during the day fighting.

Stuart: I'm sorry, Kitty, we didn't catch that.

Thomas: [off-microphone] Fighting seems to be spreading. I don't want to paint too graphic a picture, but at least one of the rebel factions — the "Red Claws" or "Sons of Benin" — is reportedly burning prisoners alive. And we've just received additional reports of blood drinking. It must be a traditional practice—

Stuart: I'm sorry, we appear to have lost the satellite link.

Oddly, finance is where tensions in the monstrous community come to the fore. It appears that every creature species has multiple, often mutually hostile financial factions. Webs of alliance seem to be spun rapidly and casually, and discarded just as quickly. Perhaps this is due to the density of market players, with our demonic cooks jostling one another to stir the soup.

Yet I wonder if this conflict is perhaps more formal. Could it be that our dark overlords eschew physical violence with their brethren whenever possible? Perhaps they use their influence to fight proxy battles of some sort, preferring the halls of financial power because of the real as well as symbolic profits that can be reaped.

If this is the case, then it is entirely possible that this frivolous economic warfare and profit-taking is responsible for our economy's consistent downward trend over the past 25 years. It seems as if the system is decaying and its players become increasingly focused on the short term. Regardless of the cause, the result is the same: fat parasites and a recession that has been ongoing for almost three decades.

The Church

Mother Church, opiate of the masses. Few things have been a greater burden on the history and progress of mankind than the dogged belief that putting it over the plate for Jesus (or whomever) will buy you a ticket to paradise. It's probable that no force in human history has claimed as many lives or generated as much hatred as the Crusades — wars started by various believers to cleanse or convert the world in the name of their various and sundry exclusionary faiths.

Some of you believe the source of our power is something religious. I've been told that we deal with angels, the True God, saints, spirits of nature, kami and a number of other things. I don't believe any of it. My experience tells me that *every* religion ends up serving the monsters.

Think about it logically, then historically. What is a god, spirit or what have you? It's an entity more powerful than yourself, which claims the authority to tell you what to do. And what do we hunt? Powerful beings that use humanity for their own ends.

Every doctrine of an afterlife encourages us to keep quiet and be humble. That's not a new insight. But few atheists stop to realize how their convictions of a material universe shore up monsters' defenses — "The supernatural can't exist!" Likewise, the belief that there is no afterlife encourages inaction, out of fear of losing the only life we have. So even doubt and agnosticism keep us in line, weakening every foundation necessary for effective action. That's right, *every* belief can and does serve our enemies.

So if you shouldn't believe anything, and shouldn't believe nothing, what's left? Careful examination is the only faith I have. I see what my senses (including these new powers) show me, and respond to it. I don't know what the ultimate nature of reality is, and don't expect to find out. But by focusing on tangible reality, I escape most — not all, just most — of the traps laid for us in the realm of belief.

Every time this subject comes up, some devout follower thinks I accuse him of being a servant of the enemy. That's not what I mean. I think your beliefs advance *their* agendas, but I don't think that (most of) you actually serve in any direct sense, witting or unwitting. We have all been implanted with little ideological and conceptual bombs that our prey trigger when we get too close to them — "What I just saw can't possibly have been real." The most important thing is to keep examining yourself, to make sure you know why you believe what you do, and to be ready to change beliefs when the true facts emerge.

In the absence of verifiable evidence, I offer some of my own conclusions. It was once easy for me to believe that the first god-kings were men who would be gods. Now I'm not so sure. I think they were monsters who ruled humanity openly, and were later driven underground by the explosion of the human population, or perhaps by some force or event that has been mythologized into the Indo-European flood myth. As much as I dislike giving ground to the Beneficent Alien Brothers/ Angels theorists, perhaps the same process that created the imbued happened earlier in history and is happening again.

How many divine figures (the Dead and Reborn God, the Horned God, the Dionysian Celebrant) have roots as monsters masquerading as gods? I doubt we'll ever know, but regardless of gods' origins, their edifices of worship are now the domains of night folk. I wonder how much of the decline of organized religion is a parallel to the decline of the modern economy. In both cases, it seems as if manipulation by various creatures seeking short-term results has broken the very system.

The Catholic Church and other large organized churches — at least in America — seem to be burnt-out shells, the end results of successful infestation. I'm sure in places with more spiritually enthused populations, these sects still serve a purpose as tools of social control for supernaturals. Recently, it seems as if monsters have begun to adopt a more grass-roots approach. You'd be surprised at the how many sun-staring messiahs, charismatic lunatics and other junior-league Jim Jones are out there. They come in all colors, and their followers are from every income bracket.

From the ghetto- and barrio-dwelling revolutionary theologians to backwoods charismatic Protestants to "Progressive" churches urging their flocks to bow down to God-Socialist, all religions ask the same thing: submission of the worshipper to the agenda, and ultimately to that of whatever controls the movement. Under the right circumstances, any one of us could be persuaded to feed our children the magic purple kool-aid and follow the comet to the Better Place. It's an inherent flaw in the species.

Though they might object to having it stated in such a pejorative fashion, many contributors to this board certainly verge on this kind of belief in the Messengers. My colleagues and I have gathered a great deal of evidence that there are countless others out there who share the same feelings of abject worship, but for monsters. They're blood-puppets created in blasphemous mockeries of the communion, brain-raped minions, or just people who seek a savior to obviate the need for them to use their brains.

Such a congregation has abundant, irrefutable proof of its master's supernatural power. You cannot fake turning into a wolf before astonished followers' eyes. No doubt, when the savior sends his followers for you, you too will demonstrate evidence of supernatural power as you defend yourself. Whatever rationalizations or preconceptions followers have will be cemented in that instant. The leader is good. You are evil. What is impossible to justify to mobsters or police is perfectly rational to these fanatics, but you are still in the wrong. Where the lion or fox skin will not cover, creatures of the night use the lamb's.

And yet, there's something more to religious faith than all this. I'm not a spiritual person, but I've seen things. I've watched monsters turn away from religious prey. I've seen them avoid "holy" ground. I've even seen a devout man strike a rot with his Qu'ran and set her to terrified, smoldering flight. There's something more to religion than a 10 percent hit on your income. It has nothing to do with churches, and everything to do with something greater than earthly concerns. Perhaps this thing, whatever it is, may be one of the reasons that night-folk have been so hard on religion. If it's a bulwark against them, they have to remove the threat. Yet I have a hard time embracing the unknowable to battle the unknown.

Dear friends at St. John's Episcopal Church,

Peace be with you from the Marquesas Islands!

As you know, my life here before your good teacher Chuck brought me to God was squalid and debased. The town where I was born is enslaved to Mon Oncle Jacques, a god who is as bloodthirsty as God Jesus is merciful.

He lived deep in the forest, a day's walk from town. His hut was fenced in with logs, and hanging on the logs were the bones of my uncles and aunts, who he had chosen as sacrifices. If we did not send up our families to him he caused disaster in the shape of pestilence, or else called the rain for days and rotted the food in our gardens.

I met him once when he called for my sister, and Father chose me to guide her to the hut. He resembled an old man with no hair. Where God Jesus is healthy and strong, the island god was bony, almost like a skeleton. So feeble was his strength that he moved only when necessary, remaining until the very end on a hammock cut from skins.

That day I left town and went to Tahuata, where I met Chuck and came into service of God Jesus. I ask your help as my Christian brothers to go back to that hut and kill him, along with all the demons of my islands.

Hugh: We can't print this in the church bulletin!

The Local Government

The local government's job is to be pushed around. National government, business interests, the cops, activists — hell, sometimes even legitimate community interests — make their presence felt. Since monsters have so much sway over all these groups, it shouldn't come as a surprise that the local bureaucracy and elected government is like putty in the creatures' hands.

Not only does the enemy have its paws on the people in regional power, it has wormed its way into the very system. The local utilities, tax bureaucracies, public-works departments, courts and magistrates — all the machinery that keeps things running is rife with puppets, rots and other things.

Pointing out infection on this level may seem insignificant compared to the previous institutions discussed, but think about how much control these minor bureaucracies have over your life. Your property taxes, driver's license, criminal record, power and gas supplies, telephone connection and call logs — all there for inspection, alteration and deletion. Cross the rots and your taxes are assessed at ten times the regular value, you're the target of a dozen "mistakenly issued" felony warrants, and they shut off your gas in November. And when they finally come for you, your telephone doesn't work. I've seen it happen. Societal controls are more than shackles of banality that we clamp on ourselves in hopes of a happy, numb future. We love our bondage, but we don't realize how far it reaches.

Last Words

I have two final warnings. The secret masters of the world spend a lot of time and effort preparing traps specifically for those who might uncover their plans. These efforts are conceptually distinct from the thoughts and patterns of behavior that keep people from asking questions. When those measures fail, the masters have fall-back provisions. Whether these are also elements of our civilization hard-wired by the beasts, or human truths the monsters co-opt matters little in the end. These are the ultimate traps for the unwary hunter in our world of shadows.

Monster Ibrahim Catches Souls!

Did you know? The Tiger Party has turned to sorcerers to support its despotism in Sarawak.

Have you heard? Dr. Ibrahim catches the souls of dissenters and keeps them in a row of jugs in the Gubernatorial Palace.

Who has suffered? The people of Sarawak, but especially Mohd Rizal Ali, Zaharudin bin Jais and other opposition leaders, who opposed Ibrahim the Minister-Monster and now lie asleep in hospital beds, with their souls taken out of their bodies and their resistance parties in disarray.

Beware! Do not listen to Ibrahim's speeches on Radio Malaysia and do not read his statements in the press. If you are so unlucky as to pass the Gubernatorial Palace, shield your eyes and do not look into the windows, or else you risk joining Mohd Rizal Ali with your soul in a jar.

First is the idea of "insanity," one of the most monster-friendly concepts imaginable. Anyone who experiences more of the world than most is often ignored, labeled insane or even persecuted. Since some people have genuine mental illnesses or delusional beliefs, normal people aren't excessively foolish or wicked when they refuse to believe us. It's just that the definition of insanity makes it easy to lump us in with the sick people, and hard for us to prove that we don't belong. Don't go so far out on a limb that the very people you seek to protect put you away. They might think they're doing you a favor, when they're in fact helping the enemy.

Second, since it's also true that there are cruel, hurtful members of the human race, it's easy to categorize hunters as such threats because we're capable of violent action. If normal people knew what we know, they'd be violent, too. Sadly, they're in the dark. So when individuals find out you want to take down an admired leader or a cherished ideal, all the fine rhetorical justifications in the world will still sound like insanity. Suddenly, you're the bad guy. Through no fault of their own, well-intended normal people can hinder us as effectively as legions of walking corpses. Keep your agenda to yourself and to those who can truly understand you — assuming you can trust them.

From the desk of Dr. M. K. Nkbele
Francistown, Botswana

May 7 — The child's dreams display all the signs of paranoid schizophrenia, although the historical elements are worthy of comment. How could her unconscious mind have collected such horrific details? They certainly don't teach these things at the village school.

"White Mister Death" is the element that disturbs me most especially insofar as the character has identified itself to the child as the ghost of cecil rhodes. i know for a fact that we do not teach the children about rhodes. it makes no sense to preserve the memory of the supreme white imperialist when the school day has barely enough hours to teach the true history of our nation.

The child's intricate descriptions of a "bush of ghosts" ruled by corpses go far beyond anything in the case histories. the mother and mrs. mbuto at the school agree that the girl has not read or even heard of the tutuola novel so that influence can be discounted.

I see no point in dwelling on the morbid dimensions of the dreams, be they the mountain of rotting elephant corpses or the "steaming ghost-railroad" that rides rails of iron and ivory and connects white mister death's cities.

Diagnosis: institutionalisation with pharmaceutical therapy (haliperidol).

Conclusions

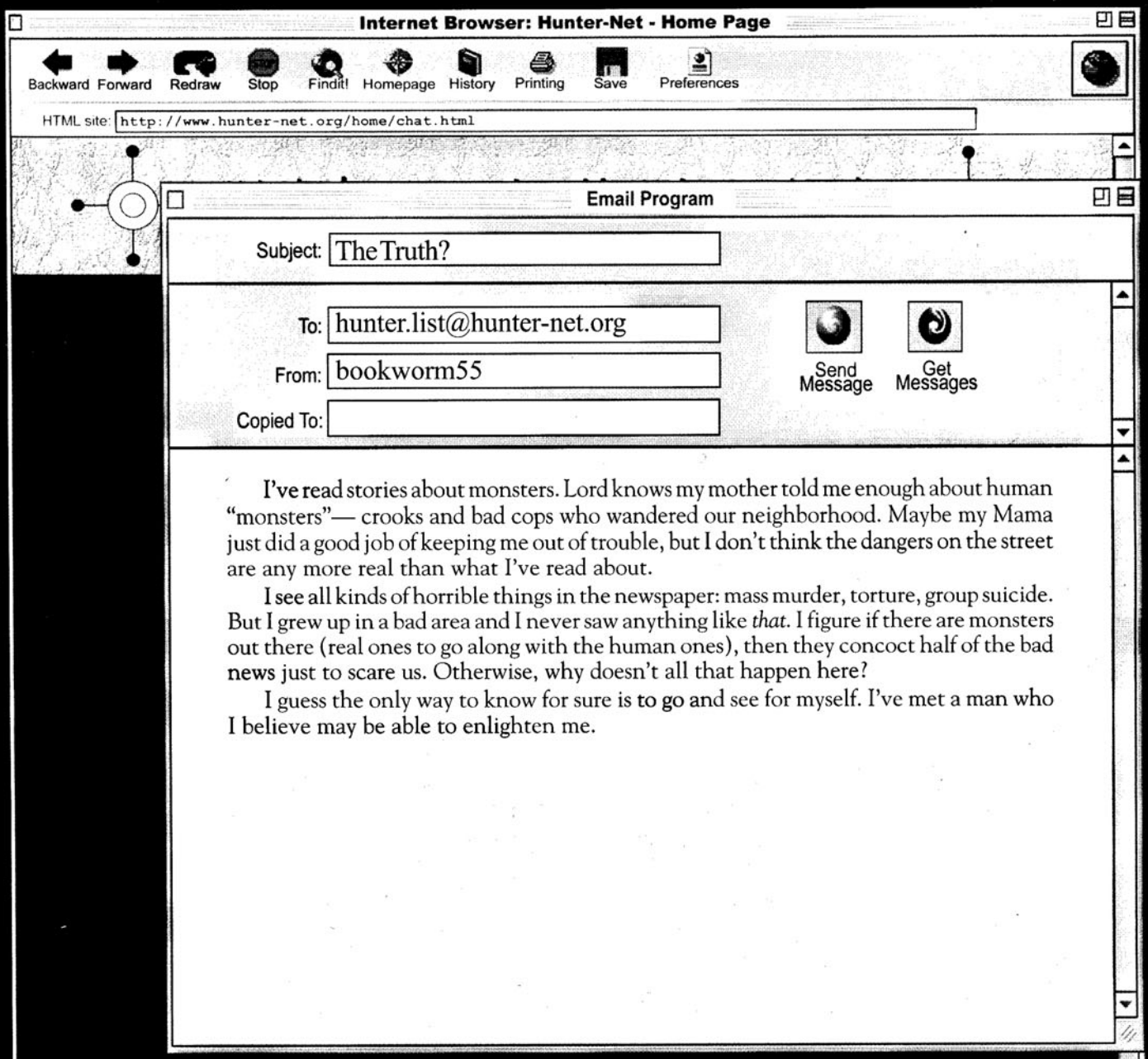
I think the monsters have been with us since we first made bricks and built temples to the god-kings. The rots guided our hands when we planted the first grain, and the warlocks steadied our strokes when we first put stylus to clay and set down Hammurabi's Laws. Have we been bred — have we bred ourselves — to the harness? Is our need to be commanded, our burning desire to do what we're told, just a sign that we have been tamed by the lash? And when we have finally extinguished our last spark of freedom under a wave of mood pills and hate-crime laws and gun control, will we be anything other than domesticated?

What words of comfort can I possibly offer? Precious few, I'm afraid.

We know that the forces of darkness don't *always* win. Ideas like individual worth, ownership of one's self and freedom of thought and action have broken through the barriers that monsters have placed in our way. We, the imbued, exist and can ply our calling as we see fit. The odds are overwhelmingly against us, but defeat only becomes *certain* when we do nothing. Prepare to lose, but continue the struggle as long as you can, in every way you can.

Domesticated dogs can yet turn feral. We have to bite the shadowy hand that has fed us for millennia. Inherit the Earth!

TRANSISTOR
SIX
SPACE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I've read stories about monsters. Lord knows my mother told me enough about human "monsters"— crooks and bad cops who wandered our neighborhood. Maybe my Mama just did a good job of keeping me out of trouble, but I don't think the dangers on the street are any more real than what I've read about.
I see all kinds of horrible things in the newspaper: mass murder, torture, group suicide. But I grew up in a bad area and I never saw anything like *that*. I figure if there are monsters out there (real ones to go along with the human ones), then they concoct half of the bad news just to scare us. Otherwise, why doesn't all that happen here?
I guess the only way to know for sure is to go and see for myself. I've met a man who I believe may be able to enlighten me.

CHAPTER 3: THE HUNTER'S CREED (CHARACTER TYPES)

I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me.
— Job 33:9

Before your character was imbued, she was a normal person. She had a life, dreams and pursuits. She also had her own ideas, values and beliefs. Perhaps she was devoutly religious and extended charity and goodwill to others. Perhaps she eschewed religion, but had faith in her own ability to accomplish goals and expected others to do the same. Maybe she accepted aspects from a variety of faiths and looked for bigger answers from there, with an understanding of numerous religions and cultures. Maybe she worked hard for the sake of work or relied on the efforts of others to get her through, or chose random targets in life and strove toward them.

It's important to know who your character was before. Once she is imbued, her former values and beliefs persist. In fact, they often determine her course and purpose in coming to grips with the true world, the existence of monsters and the hunt itself. A charitable person might now believe in offering forgiveness or aid to monsters whom she feels are deserving. A driven person might see self-sacrifice as her greatest weapon against the unknown, or she might find no tolerance for the evil she perceives and seeks to destroy it utterly. An open-minded person might believe that there's good and evil in monsters *and* humans, and wonders if there's a greater purpose to the imbuing than putting down the supernatural.

It's therefore essential to know who your character was as a normal person — what she believed in and hoped for. Those values determine her approach to the hunt in terms of your character's creed. Creeds are the roles hunters play in the ongoing war with the unknown, the philosophies that hunters observe regarding the horrific world to which they are exposed and the attitudes the chosen have toward the monsters they face. Also, creeds represent the direction that hunters give to pursuing and fulfilling the precepts of their Virtues (see p. 127).

The Creeds

There are seven creeds to choose from in **Hunter**. Your character has only one. They are grouped according to Virtues, which are generalizations about your character's ultimate goals in the hunt. The creeds are assigned to Virtues as follows:

Virtue	Creed
Mercy	Innocence, Martyrdom, Redemption
Vision	Visionary
Zeal	Defense, Judgment, Vengeance

The Virtues are explained fully in Chapter 4. Creeds are explained here.

What do all these explanations and guidelines mean in a story, though? Your character's creed, chosen during her creation as outlined in the next chapter, is no social classification or organizational group to which she belongs. Your character isn't part of a creed as she might be in a profession or club. Her creed is an in-game interpretation of how she goes about and perceives her mission.

Your character's *primary Virtue* — Zeal, Mercy or Vision — indicates what she upholds as the goal of the war — perhaps to destroy the supernatural and reclaim the world or to try to preserve whatever's good in creatures before the world comes to an end. Her *creed* is the means by which she hopes to fulfill that goal, the direction she takes. Although hunters can have the same primary Virtue, say Zeal, those of different creeds seek to accomplish the same goals in different ways. An Avenger intends to tear down the supernatural one creature at a time, by tooth and nail if necessary. A Defender seeks to preserve something worth saving in the world. She wants the unknown destroyed, but not at the expense of whatever she values. A Judge seeks to make sure that the right course of action is taken, that the creatures who truly need to be destroyed are done in, while balance and perspective are maintained among hunters themselves.

Your character's creed is therefore his philosophy about the World of Darkness as he now understands it, his take on abominations and how he should deal with them. Thus, his creed is a factor of his identity and belief system, not of any outward institution.

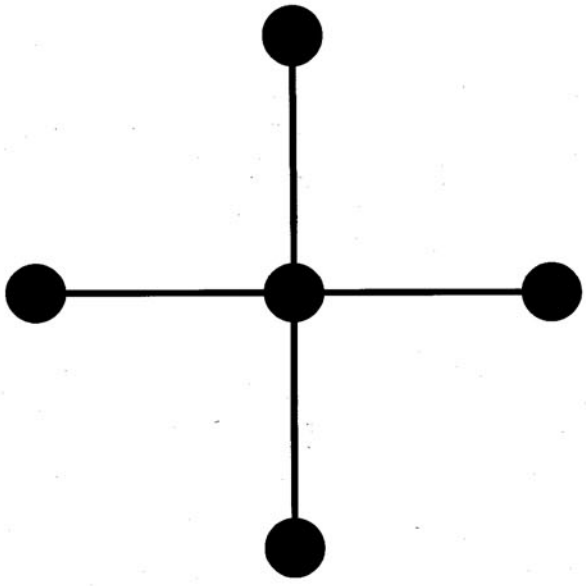
That last point is key to understanding and depicting your character as a realistic person and a human being. She is an individual with ideas and beliefs. Those values determine how she responds to an apocalyptic world controlled by unspeakable beasts. Her answer to the truth is a product of who she is and the ideals she upholds. Thus, even though your character wields bizarre powers, she is still human. Her approach to the hunt is on individual and personal terms, not along any regimented or social lines. Your character is herself first, with her own ideas and concerns. She attacks, saves or outwits the supernatural because that's what she believes in doing. Her creed is simply a handle with which to identify her reaction.

So, when you create your character, don't decide "I wanna play one of those people who sacrifices himself all the time." Rather, decide who your character is as a person — before he's imbued — and then choose a creed that suits that identity. Or let the Storyteller assign your character a creed based on his first instinctive reaction to the unknown.

Because the hunt is so personal, hunters don't widely recognize creeds as classifications among their kind. The chosen simply seem to pursue different agendas: some that coincide and others that clash violently. Only among hunters who communicate often, such as individuals on hunter-net, have lines begun to be drawn between hunter factions. These divisions are less conscious than they are unconscious; contributors to the site tend to break off into circles of the like-minded, where they share their triumphs and frustrations and search out ways to convince the others that they have the answers to the questions that plague all hunters. The vague divisions that exist between camps are evident in the numerous names applied to the creeds; no group has any one title or identifier that's used universally.

So by all means, write your character's creed on your character sheet. However, rather than decide how she acts in keeping with that "group," decide how that group coincides with her values. The ways in which she copes with the hunt and reality itself follow naturally from there.

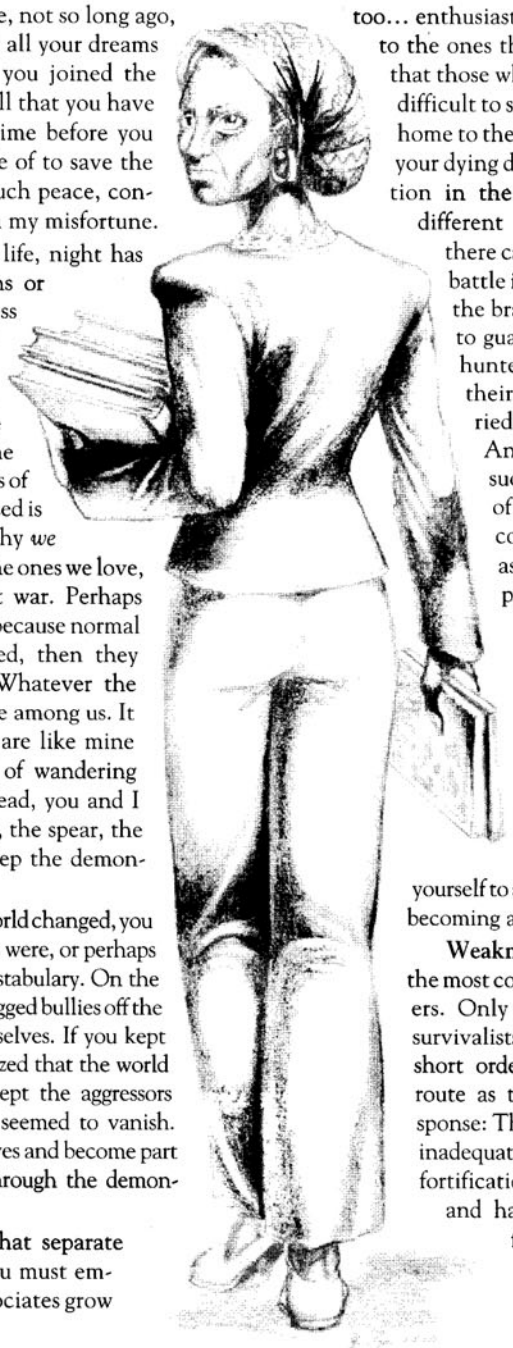
What follows are comments from various members of each creed expounding on various aspects of what they and their fellow hunters do.



DEFENSE

People say the world's going to Hell. They're wrong. Hell's come to the world and we're the thin red line.

You probably remember a time, not so long ago, when night meant rest. When not all your dreams were nightmares. A time before you joined the hunt, before you stood to defend all that you have and everything that you are. A time before you knew the violence you are capable of to save the life of another. If you can recall such peace, consider yourself lucky and learn from my misfortune.



In my country, for my whole life, night has always been when fools with guns or clubs wander under cover of darkness to murder their neighbors. They used to claim that politics motivated their killings. My mother, a fool of another sort, believed those claims and thought herself one of the "right people." She died at the hands of her own tribe. What she never realized is that war does not care, which is why *we* must care. For you and I to protect the ones we love, we must recognize that we are at war. Perhaps demon-people walk the night now because normal people gave their hearts to hatred, then they changed to match their hearts. Whatever the reason, you know such creatures are among us. It could be that nations everywhere are like mine now, except their nights are full of wandering killers that need no weapons. Instead, you and I and our kind must take up the gun, the spear, the chain — whatever works — to keep the demon-people at bay.

Whatever you were before the world changed, you are now a soldier. Perhaps you always were, or perhaps a firefighter, or a member of the constabulary. On the schoolyard, you were the one who dragged bullies off the children too small to fight for themselves. If you kept your eyes open as you aged, you realized that the world was much like the schoolyard, except the aggressors multiplied even as people like you seemed to vanish. Maybe watching others lose themselves and become part of that mob is what lets you see through the demon-people's disguises.

Caution and caring are all that separate hunters from mobs. Sometimes you must embody those qualities when your associates grow too... enthusiastic. They say we must carry the war to the ones that started it. Remind your fellows that those who take up the burden of war find it difficult to set aside. Think of carrying your war home to the people you fight for. Think of what your dying does for them: It leaves their protection in the hands of persons with agendas different from your own. In this conflict, there can be no truer form of defeat. When battle is the only way, remember that even the bravest of your fellows need someone to guard the flanks. And remember that hunters sometimes need protection from their own foolhardiness. Any attack carried out with ease is probably a trap. And anyone who finds shame in a successful retreat probably wasn't part of it. Answer all who accuse you of cowardice, for losing the trust of your associates makes you less effective at protecting them and others.

There are no eager warriors among us. That kind dedicate themselves to revenge, it seems. Our kind are reluctant to fight, yet resolute. Let others chase the adversary back to its lair. Watch over them as you are able, but preserve hearth and home most fiercely. Lose your loved ones and you are almost sure to lose yourself to anger soon after. Do that and you risk becoming a threat yourself.

Weaknesses: Withdrawal into isolation is the most common problem that affects Defenders. Only a handful start out as so-called survivalists, but many gravitate to such lives in short order. Defenders with family go this route as their fears grow. It's a natural response: The more you see out there, the more inadequate simple bars and alarms seem. Home fortification itself is routine among hunters and hardly a problem. If you live in a fortress and won't leave it for fear of what you might come home to find, seek help.

More troublesome are loners, Defenders who typically lack family and transfer that protective urge to fellow hunters. Restraint at the wrong time can cost an advantage or even lives. Regret for such casualties eats at the hearts of these imbued.

A scarier form of transference occurs to a Defender who identifies or sympathizes so strongly with the enemy that he comes between hunters and prey. It's a rare turn of events, but a Defender who has some tie to a target (Surprise, your Uncle Jimmy's a creature of the night!) might give his life trying to save it. Scariest are Defenders who claim it's not their place to judge. They see hunters *and* monsters as predators who all need to be kept apart and leashed.

Apocrypha: Traditionalists interpret the world's dire circumstances as part of a test that must be undergone to guide the rest of humanity through as well. Some of you establish urban "missions" to simultaneously satisfy the urgings of faith and to install protectorates in cities. Everything from tutelary gods to angels turn up in your favorite explanations of the Messengers.

Noteworthy among nontraditionalists are the Conscience of Earth followers, who hold tent revivals and preach about the "awakening of the joint conscience of the world's peoples." Everything the group says sounds pretty innocuous, but cities that have hosted this bunch have also seen masked hunters interfere with local activities.

You "antitraditionalist" Defenders reject religion as divisive or oppressive. You see abuse and corruption everywhere, and also did so before being imbued. Your ideas about the Messengers are creative to say the least: "Man, it's ESP caused by psychotropic drugs the CIA put in our LSD" or "The Earth Mother chose us to save her from mutant toxophagic polluters, these guys who, like, live off poisons...."

No matter how you interpret your hunter role, your greatest prize is the world itself. If you cannot claim a place for humanity to live safely, what point is there in living?

The Imbuing: Budding Defenders seem to confront the most single-minded of creatures, ones that appear to have a specific target and that ignore all others. Some of you speak of a first foe that seemed as unwilling to harm you as it was determined to kill its intended victim. Others describe sieges mounted against your own homes or workplaces, situations that required quelling the terror around you even as you fought off your attackers.

Character Creation: Defenders start with high Perception scores, lots of Empathy and ample Willpower. They can be extremely judgmental toward people they see as indifferent or careless. Many possess the Allies Background in the form of family, a congregation or a neighborhood watch association. Soldiers or police may have the Contacts Background to indicate such affiliations.

Starting Conviction: 3

A. K. A.: Protectors, Fences, Dead-eyes, the Cavalry; *Verteidiger*; *Défenseurs*

Stereotypes

Avengers — Every war needs warriors, and these guys'll take the fight to the enemy's doorstep.

Bystanders — Just because they choked when it mattered doesn't mean they can't help now... but not by watching *my* back, thank you.

Innocents — They don't belong in a fight like this. They're the ones we're trying to save.

Judges — They consider every option, even though the course is obvious to us.

Martyrs — Probably the group that's closest to us, but they don't even know it.

Redeemers — If they catch you straying from the straight and narrow, look out!

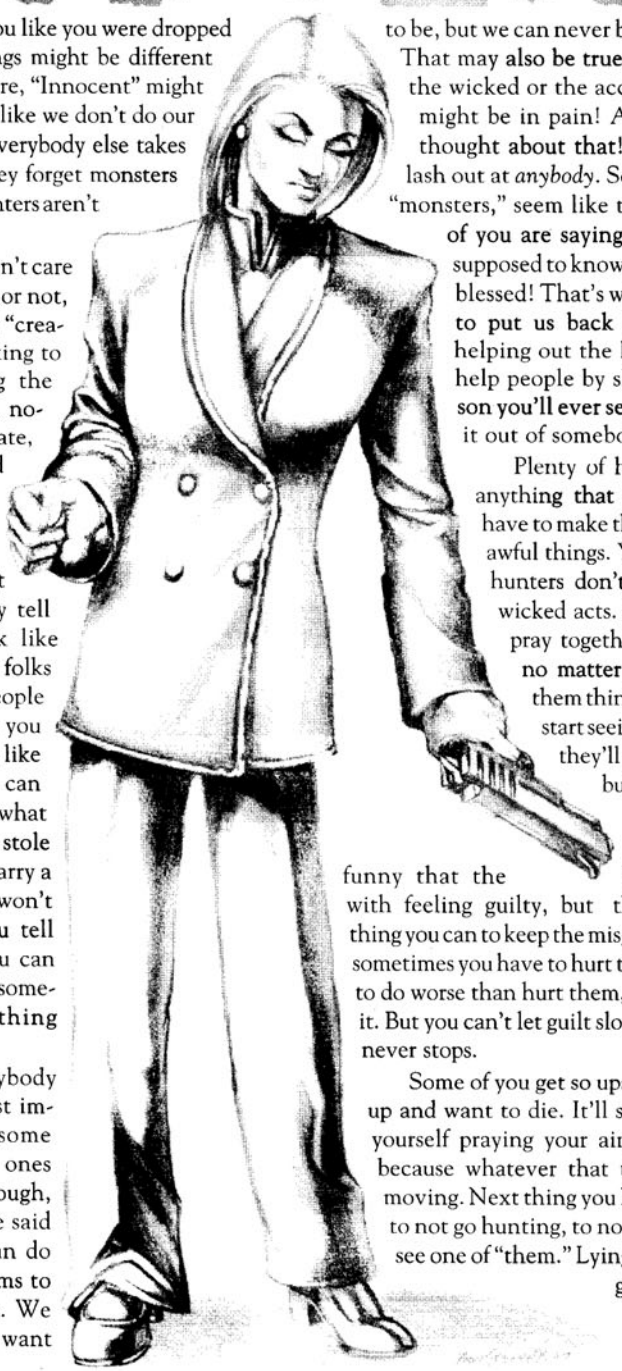
Visionaries — They're full of ideas, but not always good ones... that fellow showing off his powers on television was imprudent.

The Enemy — They're everywhere. Safety first.

DEFENDER

INNOCENCE

What's wrong with you? That's not how zombies act in the movies at all! Here, let me show you....



Do other hunters treat you like you were dropped on your head as a kid? Things might be different where you are, but around here, "Innocent" might as well mean "idiot." It's not like we don't do our share. It could just be that everybody else takes this stuff so seriously that they forget monsters aren't always bad. Just like hunters aren't always good.

Sometimes the others don't care if a crime is a creature's fault or not, even when they've seen that "creature" acting normal and talking to his neighbors and mowing the grass. If you don't speak up, nobody will. And when it's too late, everybody gets all quiet, and they get mad if you ask why it had to happen that way. They tell you, "'Cause we kill things." You tell them that people are not things. They tell you these things only look like people. You tell them some folks like to say that about the people they want to hurt. They ask you to help them steal something, like a car or a big gun, so they can hunt with it. You ask them what they would do if somebody stole their stuff. They ask you to carry a gun. When they say they won't carry a gun if you will, you tell them "Okay!" That way you can cut down on the chance of somebody else doing something everybody may regret.

"Doing right by everybody caught up in the hunt is just impossible." You've heard some hunter say those words, or ones close to them. A year ago, though, the same person would have said *all* the things us hunters can do and see are impossible! Seems to me a little faith is in order. We may never be as good as we want to be, but we can never be any better than we *try* to be. That may also be true of the folks some of you call the wicked or the accursed or just monsters. They might be in pain! Ask your buddies if they ever thought about that! If an animal is hurt, it may lash out at *anybody*. Some of these poor folks, these "monsters," seem like trapped beasts. 'Course, some of you are saying to yourselves, "How are we supposed to know that?" Well, that's why you're blessed! That's why there are healers among us to put us back together when we get hurt helping out the less fortunate. And you can't help people by shooting them. The only reason you'll ever see a gun in my hands is to keep it out of somebody else's.

Plenty of hunters are ready to wipe out anything that looks less than normal. You have to make them think twice before they do awful things. You're with them to show that hunters don't have to act wicked to stop wicked acts. Start small. Get everybody to pray together after somebody gets killed, no matter who it was. If you can start them thinking like human beings, they'll start seeing themselves that way. Maybe they'll see others that way one day, but they have to believe in their own goodness first.

Weaknesses: It's sort of funny that the Innocent have so much trouble with feeling guilty, but that's life. After you try everything you can to keep the misguided from hurting somebody, sometimes you have to hurt them, too. Sometimes you have to do worse than hurt them, or help one of your friends do it. But you can't let guilt slow you down or the hurting just never stops.

Some of you get so upset over the hunt you just curl up and want to die. It'll sneak up on you. You'll catch yourself praying your aim is steady or giving thanks because whatever that thing was, it finally stopped moving. Next thing you know, you're figuring out ways to not go hunting, to not go outside so you won't even see one of "them." Lying in bed crying all day is a dead giveaway that you got the hunter's blues. The worst part is, there's usually nobody you

can tell except other hunters, and seeing them can start you feeling bad all over again. A few just can't handle it. There was a fellow who ran with us, left us a note that said, "I'm done." Haven't seen a lick of him since. Hope he managed to give the blues the slip.

What you really have to watch out for is shamming.... You know, "Keeping up with the Joneses." Trying to be like everybody else on a hunt will make you crazy. Be yourself and keep ahold of your soul. Start acting all hard and harsh, next thing you know you'll *be* that way. And nothing's harder to find again than lost innocence. Might be that once it's gone, it's gone for good. Some use the word "innocent" to mean impressionable. If that's true of you, maybe you should be trying to leave an impression on *them* instead.

Apocrypha: Why does anything happen? Why do people worry about it so much? We have invisible friends who look out for us all. They want us to look out for everybody else and to keep people from hurting each other. That way we can all be around when something better comes along; we can all reap the reward. What's so hard to understand?

The Imbuing: Run-ins with things that look a lot worse than they act are typical when Innocents get the Power. A lot of you are really good at calming people's fears, sometimes with nothing other than words. Those of you who mix it up with a critter dead-set on mayhem usually try talking him or her — or it — out of whatever badness is under way. Doesn't always work, and a few of you have the scars to prove it, but that doesn't stop you from trying the same trick again later.

Character Creation: Many Innocents have Charisma as their foremost Attribute, and high Empathy is a must. Otherwise, because Innocence wears so many different faces, there are few generalities that can be stated about this creed. Innocents *can* be children, but roleplaying them in a "realistic" setting can be difficult. Better candidates are the shielded, the uncomplicated and the endlessly hopeful.

Starting Conviction: 3

A. K. A.: The Blessed, Bait, Optimists, Fools

Stereotypes

Avengers — They're very angry, sometimes for no obvious reason.

Bystanders — I try to show them some respect since most of the others don't.

Defenders — I feel safe when they're around.

Judges — Even when they do stuff that doesn't seem to make sense (like that guy on TV), they've got a plan in mind.

Martyrs — There already was a Jesus.

Redeemers — They seem like nice people, but they talk a lot.

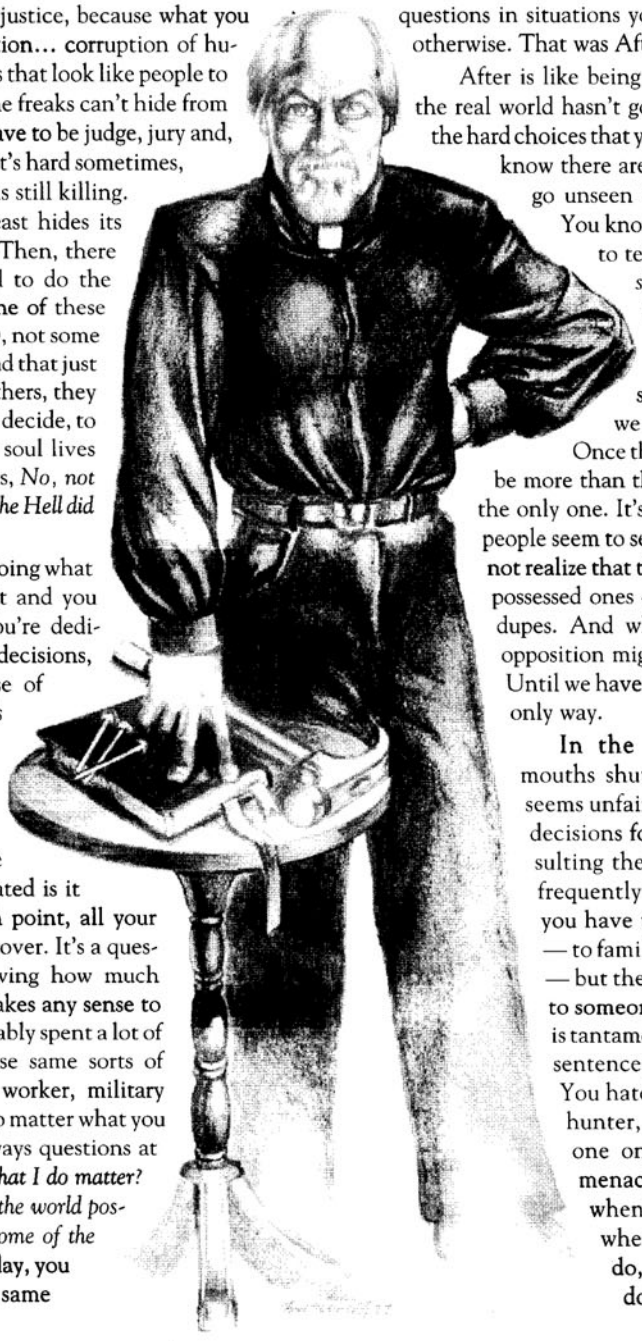
Visionaries — We understand each other.

The Enemy — If we could just understand them, all this trouble would be over.

INNOCENT

JUDGEMENT

I accuse you. Not simply of being corrupt, but of being a corrupter, of making every person around you — even your accusers — more like you. How do you plead?



What you do is not about justice, because what you fight isn't crime. It's abomination... corruption of humanity, body and soul, by things that look like people to the people around them. But the freaks can't hide from you and me, which is why we have to be judge, jury and, yes, even executioner at once. It's hard sometimes, because killing a beast of prey is still killing. It's even harder when that beast hides its nature behind a perfect mask. Then, there are times when you get asked to do the impossible, when you know one of these things is hiding inside *somebody*, not some trick of flesh, not something dead that just doesn't know it yet. And the others, they look to you, they wait for you to decide, to choose whether some unlucky soul lives or dies, and all you can think is, *No, not me, not again* — that and, *How the Hell did I wind up here, doing this?*

The answer is that you're doing what you do *because* you question it and you question your part in it. If you're dedicated, you make a thousand decisions, large and small, in the course of every hunt: *Will silver work this time? Do we involve those civilians or not? Can this one be "exorcised," or do we just kill the poor bastard it's controlling before it kills someone else?* The problem with being too dedicated is it can make you *dead*. At which point, all your careful weighing of the facts is over. It's a question of balance, and of knowing how much balance is too much, if that makes any sense to you. Probably it does. You probably spent a lot of your time Before making these same sorts of decisions as a doctor, social worker, military person, or even as... a judge. No matter what you did day by day, there were always questions at the back of your mind: *Does what I do matter? Does it make things better? Can the world possibly be improved by removing some of the people who are in it?* Then, one day, you found yourself asking those same questions in situations you'd never have imagined otherwise. That was After.

After is like being in another world, except the real world hasn't gone anyplace — nor have the hard choices that you've got to make. You just know there are aspects of the world that go unseen by most of the populace. You know the right thing might be to tell them, *Look, see what we share the planet with?* But you know better because they can't see what's plain to you. There'll come a time soon when we'll know what we face and where it hides. Once that's true, going public may be more than the safe course; it might be the only one. It's difficult to tell, but some people seem to serve the forces we fight but not realize that they're pawns in a war! Not possessed ones or anything like that, just dupes. And who knows whose ear the opposition might be bending right now? Until we have a clue, discreet valor is the only way.

In the meantime, keep your mouths shut and your eyes open. It seems unfair, like the sighted making decisions for the blind without consulting them. Rely on this: You are frequently going to hate the things you have to do. You hate the lying — to family, to friends, to associates — but the truth is deadly. Telling it to someone who can't *see* the truth is tantamount to signing their death sentence, not to mention your own. You hate having to judge another hunter, to decide whether someone on your side is more of a menace than the enemy. That's when you hate killing the most, when it seems that what you do, what all hunters do, is doomed to fail. But stronger

than your hatred of the dark, hard place you now know the world to be is your fear of what it might become if nobody makes the hard choices. Your choices.

Weaknesses: Indecision is the bane of your existence. Every Judge faces it at some point. Expect it, but don't let it become a constant. That's just an invitation for other hunters to sideline you or follow anybody's counsel. Free-for-alls endanger the very people you try to protect and also draw attention from the law. As tough as you have to be on yourself and your fellows, *real* judges are sure to be a lot less understanding than you are.

The other extreme is no better: Megalomania is believing that you — and only you — know what's right on the hunt. You're there to keep it orderly, to remind hunters of who they are and what they do — and *don't* do. You're not there to think for them. Remember your place, but make sure others know theirs, too.

Legalistic Judges are a pain in our collective ass. There's a fine line between establishing and maintaining a code of behavior and becoming hidebound. If you're always certain, you haven't thought of all the questions.

Apocrypha: You know the signs of Judgment Day's approach when you see them. Many of you gather information before the end. After all, tactics without intelligence is suicide. Many of you regularly cite *Revelation* or Nostradamus or *The Book of the Dead*. Others, insistent in your belief that hunters like us are not new at all, point to Joan of Arc or Bernadette of Lourdes as our predecessors. They said and did what was right to save their worlds, and so should you.

A good number of you claim to have found faith for the first time thanks to the evils you face and your quests for answers. Others say your notions of a benevolent or guiding force in the universe have been undone or obliterated by the changes in the world. Half of you think events have brought you closer to your loved ones, half feel you've never been more distant.

The most proactive Judges take part in their communities through outreach programs and the like, as much to monitor their localities and run efficient hunts as to steady their conflicted feelings about their activities. And about themselves. Consider this advice from the voice of experience.

The Imbuing: A common denominator among Judges — a rarity among other hunters — is having to face multiple freaks your first time out. These are usually things fighting each other, rather than threatening people directly — which is not to say people can't get hurt in the process. Some Judges talk about their Becoming in terms of a test where you have to identify the most imminent threat and deal with it first. The tests you face only get harder from there.

Character Creation: Judges have outstanding Wits or Perception ratings but can waver in terms of Willpower. Whether they use force or finesse, they are always mediators in any situation. Their determination to obtain all the data relevant to reaching an important decision makes Investigation a fitting Ability. Many Judges come from professions that require ethical oversight of and by their peers; some of these fields (law, medicine) are quite lucrative, so consider the Resources Background for such characters.

Starting Conviction: 3

A. K. A.: Justices, Lawgivers, the Law; *Jueces*

Stereotypes

Avengers — Useful, but dangerous if they go unguided. Look what happened to the one who went on that news show.

Bystanders — Their usefulness should be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Defenders — Honorable people who understand temperance and fairness. They're often the hunters who alert us when "things" get out of order.

Innocents — The epitome of the defenseless human. These people are the best of us. Their steadfast belief in doing the right thing focuses our mission.

Martyrs — Walking exercises in futility, but necessary ones. Offenses against humanity are already pervasive. How much does our cause benefit from participants who *seek* victimization?

Redeemers — Essential to our success. They're the only ones able to save any abomination that *can* become human again. Unfortunately, they are sometimes too quick to pardon the guilty.

Visionaries — Valuable to the war we wage, but they may be too fond of doing it "their way."

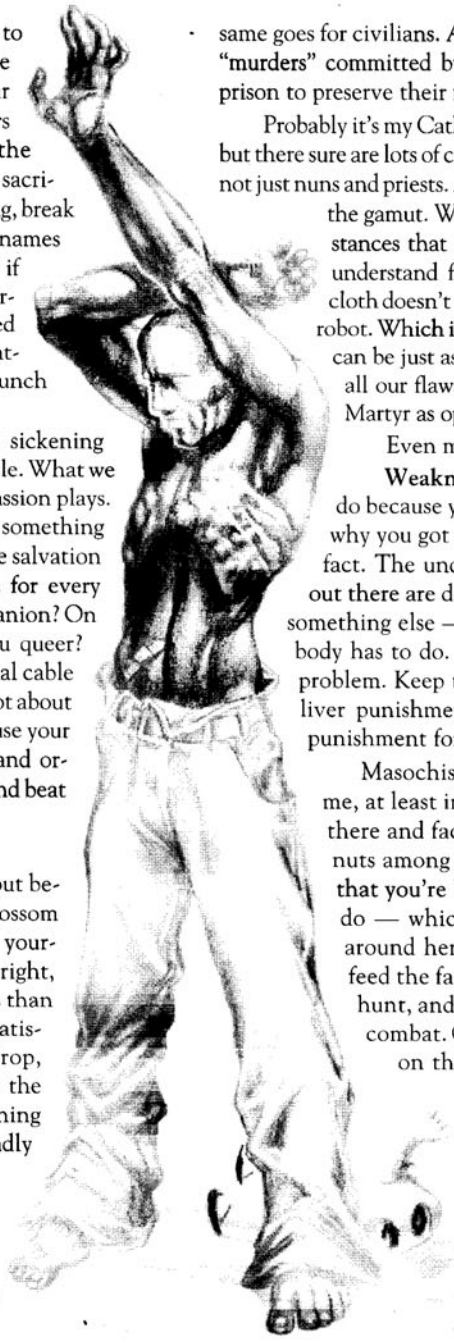
The Enemy — As diverse as the people who hunt them. To tell the truth, a few can make better allies than some hunters.

JUDGE

MARTYRDOM

We're the damned who hunt the damned.

Think of all the things you'd give up to push back doomsday. All set? Okay, if the list *starts* with your life and includes your soul, you might be a Martyr. Other hunters may sacrifice their lives to destroy the unforgiven. Martyrs have been known to sacrifice their *futures* — to pawn every belonging, break every tie and even blot out their own good names for the cause. My advice is, "Lighten up," if there's a prayer that it'd make any difference. As it stands, we're the most screwed up, drama-addicted, self-tormenting hunters you can find... and a damn fine bunch despite all that.



Granted, some of us are stoic to a sickening extent, but that's just high drama in a muzzle. What we all ultimately want is to star in our own passion plays. Whether that's because we feel there's something that we have to atone for or because we see salvation in sacrificing ourselves for others varies for every Martyr. Is it that you cheat on your companion? On your taxes? Lie on your résumé? Are you queer? Kinked? Do you masturbate to excess? Steal cable TV? Shoplift? Get *over* it, honey. This is not about you. As for the rest of you saints, you can use your bodies to shield all the little old ladies and orphans you want, but if getting clawed up and beat on makes you hot, it's a sin.

End of editorial.

Actually, what troubles me most about being a Martyr is how many of you seem to blossom under the stress of the job (don't fool yourselves, we got hired). And lots of you (all right, me too) are more satisfied with your lives than ever before. Not happy, mind you, but satisfied. You push yourselves till you drop, volunteer for every duty, take point on the hunt, then spend the next week bitching about what a hard lot you have and how badly the world chafes your poor shoulders.

Why do other hunters put up with us? Because they know we'll take a bullet for them. We'll give blood, breath and body to keep the others alive, and the same goes for civilians. A few of you have even confessed to "murders" committed by other hunters and have gone to prison to preserve their families.

Probably it's my Catholic roots that make me notice this, but there sure are lots of clergy doing the Martyr thing, though not just nuns and priests. All persuasions turn up, and they run the gamut. Working with these people in circumstances that are not very religious has made me understand for the first time that donning the cloth doesn't make you into some denominational robot. Which is another way of saying churchly folk can be just as messed up as the rest of us. Despite all our flaws, though, I'd give anything to be a Martyr as opposed to any other kind of hunter.

Even my life.

Weaknesses: If you keep doing what you do because you enjoy the suffering — isn't that why you got picked? — it all boils down to one fact. The undeniable truth is that some of you out there are devoted masochists. You may call it something else — bad luck, an ugly job that somebody has to do. You may deny that you have this problem. Keep things in focus: You're here to deliver punishment where it's needed, not *endure* punishment for *whatever* reason.

Masochism, incomprehensible as it is to me, at least implies that you're ready to get out there and face the opposition. The self-denial nuts among you sometimes carry things so far that you're literally not prepared for what we do — which endangers all of us! A woman around here took to fasting, in part to help feed the families of people who'd died in the hunt, and in part to "cleanse" herself before combat. One night she passed out in the car on the way to a fight! Then there was the guy who started living in the group's hideaway. Turned out he'd sold everything he owned to buy the rest of us gear! It's hard to knock selflessness like that, but after a few weeks nobody wanted him around — he had no place to bathe. Please,

people, you can't be responsible for the welfare of others if you won't take care of yourselves.

Maybe it needs to be made clear that "take care of yourselves" means personal health and hygiene, not "We've all done terrible things and don't deserve to live." If you really feel the need to snuff yourself — and you know who you are — at least give your allies a chance to bow out. Ergo, dynamite vests are lousy options. And besides, they may not affect the enemy you face.

Apocrypha: There's a terrifying theory making the rounds, thanks to one of you gloom-and-doomers, that basically suggests the world has already ended and we're all in Hell! Pessimism, thou art a Martyr.

Meanwhile, most of the rest of you agree to disagree on the countless *imminent* end-of-the-world scenarios: Only a hundred God-fearing WASP couples of child-producing age will survive the coming cataclysm; only gays and lesbians will survive the coming cataclysm; only the 88 most beautiful celebrities will survive the coming cataclysm. What all these outcomes have in common is that you — you alone, you and other hunters, you and whoever else can be convinced to believe you're right — will make it happen by performing the Ultimate Sacrifice.

Hey, at least the next world will be better than this one.

The Imbuing: The talkative among you commonly describe your First as "relentless" or "a killing machine." I've seen you modest types nod in agreement. Considering the abuse most Martyrs take when they join the ranks, it's a wonder any of us is alive for any sequel.

Character Creation: Martyrs start with above-average Stamina and usually have high Empathy. Exceptions to the latter case include people who practice various forms of self-sacrifice for the attention or approval it earns them. Many members of this creed start with substantial Resources but give them away, abandon them or otherwise lose them.

Starting Conviction: 4

A. K. A.: Cassandras, Losers, Masochists, Fuck-ups

Stereotypes

Avengers — What they lack in toughness they make up for in brutality.

Bystanders — Come suffer alongside the rest of us. It's not too late.

Defenders — They sacrifice initiative for security (with the exception of that guy on TV, Mr. "Hi-America-I'm-a-monster-hunter-and-you're-all-endangered-couch-potatoes").

Innocents — Wide-eyed naiveté is not a qualification for hunting monsters.

Judges — These folks make us look like amateurs when it comes to doing the right thing.

Redeemers — The ones who agonize about this job as much as we do.

Visionaries — These people are just out of touch enough to be onto something.

The Enemy — Punishment incarnate. So what's that make us?

REDEMPTION

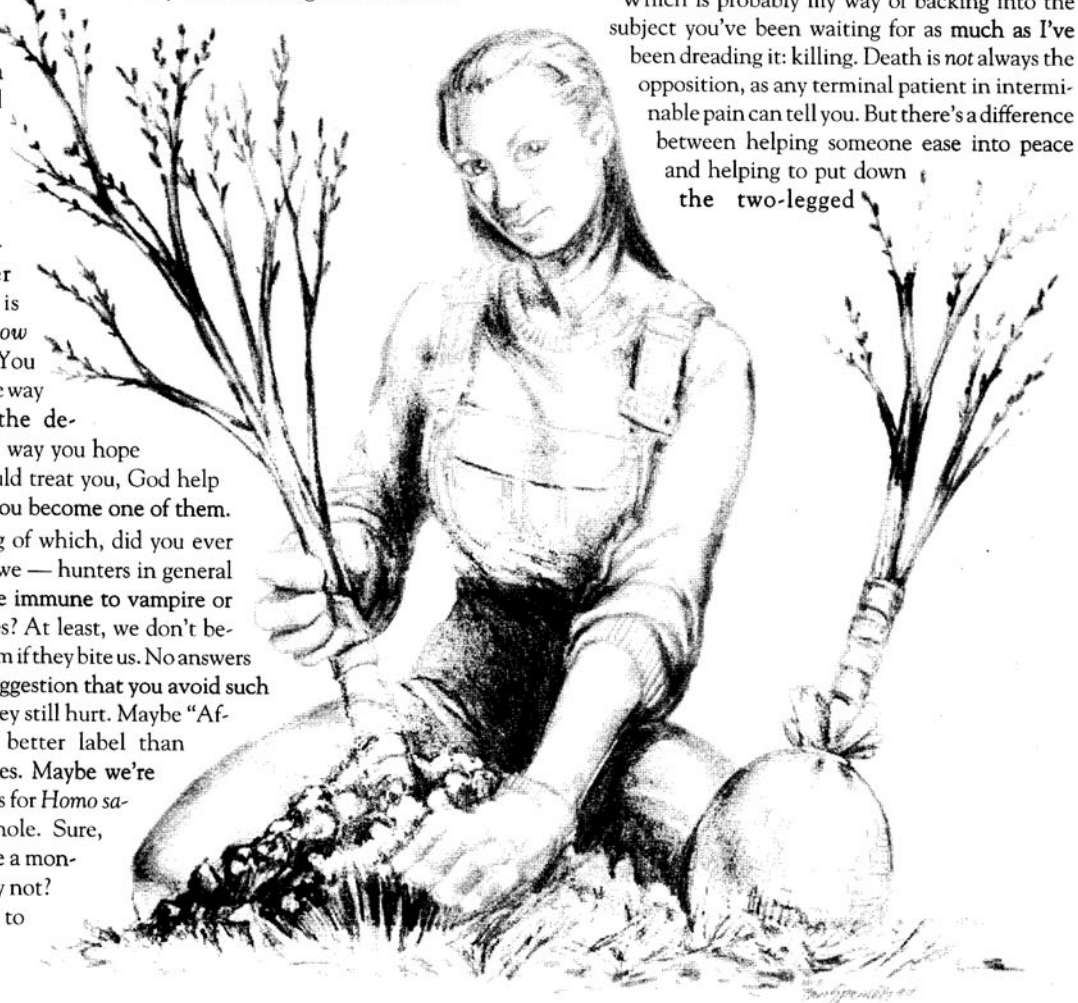
Keep still and you might live. Assuming you weren't dead to start with....

It all comes down to triage. Who's dead, who's hurt, who can be saved? The others may be here to take lives in order to preserve the lives of others. Your job is to save lives or figure out whether any life remains to be saved. You watch somebody get reduced to cinders by the light of the sun — pale winter sunlight, at that — and it makes you wonder: Are these things really "alive"? Can you heal a walking contagion? Is there a way to redeem a plague that thinks? Hey, they don't cover this stuff in medical ethics! The problem here is that the things we hunt — some call them "the Afflicted" — *look* like human beings (more or less), *talk* like human beings and appear to crave survival the way human beings do. None of which, in my book, certifies them as such, and yet... you give them the benefit of the doubt. Your first impulse after seeing one is probably, *How can I help?* You treat them the way you would the deranged... the way you hope someone would treat you, God help you, should you become one of them.

Speaking of which, did you ever wonder why we — hunters in general — seem to be immune to vampire or werewolf bites? At least, we don't become like them if they bite us. No answers here, just a suggestion that you avoid such wounds — they still hurt. Maybe "Afflicted" is a better label than anyone realizes. Maybe we're the antibodies for *Homo sapiens* as a whole. Sure, there could be a monster virus, why not? It's no harder to believe than, say, some Bela Lugosi-Lon Chaney rematch where the participants don't wear make-up and, well, aren't actors.

Take my advice: Leave the theories to the prophets. Keep your buddies in one piece, patch up victims as you're able, and save lives. Or maybe save *life*. People talk all the time about "life-and-death struggles," but nothing in all my years of trying to help people made that phrase resound in my mind as literally as it does now. These days, it's as if the Four Horsemen gallop in at regular intervals. If you've trained yourself to not personify death, or if you believe death can sometimes be good, run-ins with the Afflicted can make you question everything.

Which is probably my way of backing into the subject you've been waiting for as much as I've been dreading it: killing. Death is *not* always the opposition, as any terminal patient in interminable pain can tell you. But there's a difference between helping someone ease into peace and helping to put down the two-legged



equivalent of a rabid dog. The dog didn't plan to get rabies. What if hunters aren't immune to this "monster virus" or whatever's out there? What if we just haven't seen anyone get "properly" exposed yet? What if somebody who saved your life turns up as one of these things? Let me say for the record that if you suffer such ultimate bad luck and try to share it with me, I'm going to "contain the infection." Once that's done, if anything's left of the real you, all my energy will go into salvaging you, no matter what any other hunter has to say.

My hope is that you would do the same for me.

Weaknesses: Messianic complexes bedevil the practitioners of redemption. Redeemers may be worse than Avengers when it comes to establishing themselves at the heart of their own religions. The Power can come to mean more than the hunt. Unlike Avengers, who can have their own cult followings yet manage to remain effective hunters, some Redeemers drift away from the hunt altogether toward a "purer" calling.

Avarice seduces even more of our kind. A lot of Redeemers start out doing the occasional "miracle" for some moneybags-type, just to support the hunt. Next thing you know, that dough starts looking a lot better than risking your neck to reconnect somebody else's — and then it's "private practice" time. Money by itself is no evil, and having it can sure make the hunt safer (though seldom easier). But it should always be a means, never an end.

Absolutist Redeemers, the ones who stick to the hunt but develop god complexes of a different sort, are the worst. If you've never seen one in action, count your blessings. They're the Redemption-on-my-terms-only types who can't — or won't — see any alternatives beyond healing some freak or killing it. When they start dictating how the hunt itself needs to go down, it might be time to find a new Redeemer.

Apocrypha: Redeemers try to understand what's happened to you and your world through experience — or lack of it. You scientists, professionals, researchers and the merely informed perceive your states in logical terms — Chernobyl aftereffects, prion infection, general degradation of the biosphere — and see gloom on the horizon based on the same factors. Someone has to do *something* about it. The ignorant, uninformed or disillusioned — although no less concerned for others — fill in the gaps with whatever meaning you can: blessing, damnation, personal purpose, a government plot. To the latter, your powers and role simply complement the corrupt world; someone has to try to save the hopeless or deserving if anything good is to follow.

Ultimately, most Redeemers perceive one purpose for themselves: *We're here to help.* Yours is the task to save those who cannot save themselves. In some cases, when a body can't be healed, saving a monster literally means deprogramming it — helping undo the conditioning that created it. The subject may be willing, with a human soul trapped beneath the surface, or salvation may be imposed through force and punishing treatments until the evil side is broken. The lucky among us can find and redeem perhaps one soul after all our efforts, but we never stop looking for others.

So we all have the same purpose, yet with some of you, it's as if the rest of us should avert our eyes when you pass. Not that you ask us to, naturally, but the expectation seems there nonetheless. Some of you holier-than-thou types are about as trying as you are handy.

The Imbuing: Someone invariably gets hurt during the making of a Redeemer. You've been there: severed arteries, compound fractures, snapped necks. You've worked the miracles, you've stared at your own hands like they were never yours. You may also have worked a little magic on the *cause* of the mayhem.

Character Creation: Redeemers often couple Dexterity with some high Mental Attribute. Keep in mind that Abilities relating to Medicine are far from essential to plying Redemption. It's the hunter's urge to make things right, not being able to do so already, that matters.

Starting Conviction: 3

A. K. A.: Menders, Deprogrammers, Confessors, Healers; *Curadores*

Stereotypes

Avengers — Holy terrors.

Bystanders — They're brave to risk the same dangers that we do without the abilities we have.

Defenders — The most tolerant of the intolerant ones.

Innocents — They can get into big trouble, but they keep us sane and centered.

Judges — Their job may be tougher than any other hunter's.

Martyrs — If they want to hurt themselves, they should do it in private and spare the rest of us — and the viewers at home.

Visionaries — The strangest of us by a mile, but good to have around.

The Enemy — Wounds to be healed... or rotted extremities to be amputated.

REDEEMER

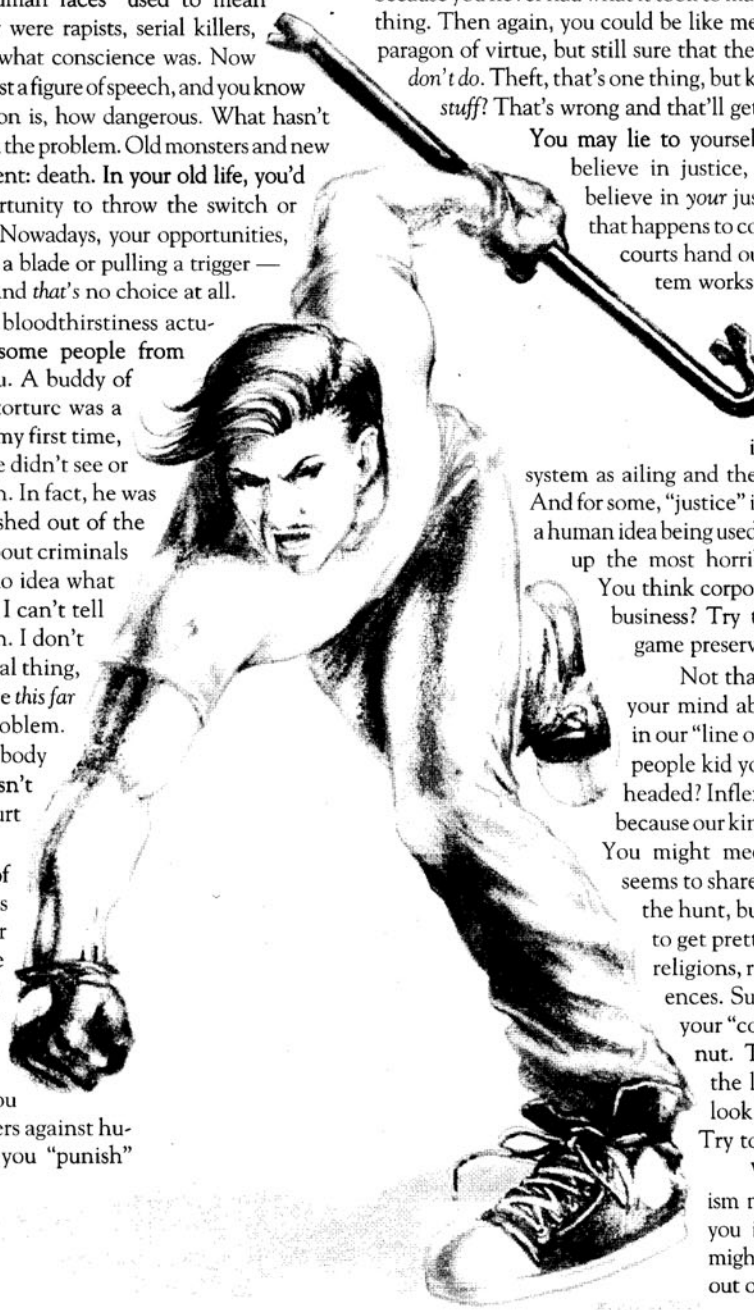
VENGEANCE

Give back the devil his own.

Admit it. You're the type who believes in an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. All of our kind do. You may be more forgiving than some or more brutal than others, but for you, justice is retribution. Chances are, even if you live someplace that doesn't practice capital punishment, you advocate it anyway. "Things wearing human faces" used to mean something different. They were rapists, serial killers, psychos who never knew what conscience was. Now you know "monster" isn't just a figure of speech, and you know how cunning the opposition is, how dangerous. What hasn't changed is how to deal with the problem. Old monsters and new ones rate the same treatment: death. In your old life, you'd have jumped at the opportunity to throw the switch or deliver a lethal injection. Nowadays, your opportunities, your choices, are swinging a blade or pulling a trigger — that, or just standing by. And *that's* no choice at all.

What's weird is that bloodthirstiness actually seems to preclude some people from hearing the Call with you. A buddy of mine always used to say torture was a good thing. He was there my first time, when it all went down. He didn't see or hear a damn thing, though. In fact, he was part of the crowd that rushed out of the bank. He still spouts off about criminals being killed, but he has no idea what he's talking about — and I can't tell him what's really going on. I don't think he could take the real thing, and if he knew, he might be *this far* from being part of the problem. You know, a rogue, somebody who goes too far and doesn't care if regular people get hurt in the process.

It's weird because, of all hunters, we're the ones likeliest to shed blood (or whatever some of those things have inside them). The others lack proportion, the idea that the punishment has to fit the crime. Of course, once you start talking about monsters against human beings, about how you "punish" something that sees you the way you see cattle, maintaining a "balanced sensibility" is tricky.



As a kid, you might've imagined yourself as a knight or maybe a gunslinger. Maybe that self-image guided you in adulthood and you became a cop or a prison guard or a bounty hunter. Or maybe it helped end your career when you blew the whistle on your employer. Or it could've remained a fantasy because you never had what it took to make others do the right thing. Then again, you could be like me — that is, nobody's paragon of virtue, but still sure that there are things *you just don't do*. Theft, that's one thing, but killing somebody over *stuff*? That's wrong and that'll get you killed.

You may lie to yourself and say you don't believe in justice, but the fact is you believe in *your* justice. For some of us, that happens to coincide with what the courts hand out. For them, the system works and what we do is a necessary evil: "If the government had people like you and me, we wouldn't be doing this." Some see the system as ailing and themselves as the cure. And for some, "justice" is a tool of the enemy, a human idea being used by monsters to cover up the most horrible shit imaginable. You think corporate prisons are good business? Try thinking of them as game preserves.

Not that you should change your mind about anything. Folks in our "line of work" rarely do. Do people kid you about being hardheaded? Inflexible? Get used to it, because our kind has extreme views. You might meet a colleague who seems to share your perspective on the hunt, but then his ideas start to get pretty out there on other religions, races or sexual preferences. Suddenly, you see that your "colleague" is a freakin' nut. Take your beliefs to the limit and others will look the same way at you. Try to remain objective.

Weaknesses: Extremism may be what brought you into the fold, but it might be what takes you out of it, too. It seems like

lots of us believed for a long time — long before hearing the Call — that whoever was running things had the wrong idea. That's why so many of us are anti-government, from white-supremacist militia members to black-separatist vigilantes, from Zapatista rebels to Irish Republican Army soldiers. The trouble here is the same as with any insurgency movement: Piss off the wrong *federales* and they make you their hobby. You don't want to have the authorities *actively* after your hide (they'll be trying to bust you regardless, so don't make it worse). Believe me, monsters are bad enough by themselves. And if you're one of those who believes monsters *are* the government, give me a day's notice before you come to my town, okay?

Intolerance goes hand in hand with some extremist activities. It's also part and parcel of some folk's religious beliefs. People with religious beliefs like that scare me. There are all-white groups and all-black groups and all-Asian groups who say their race is the only one that *can* hear the Call. Be smart and keep a clear sense of who the enemy is here. You know those murders of interracial couples in New England? The police are clueless, but everything about the crimes says it's one of us....

Obsession is a major danger for us. From lunatics who believe in preserving racial purity to nuts who'd blow up a whole building because a monster lives in the penthouse — you'll come across all varieties. Just don't join their ranks, because that makes *you* the enemy. And you know what that means. If you can't remember the last time you had dinner with your family, or the names of your family members, or whether you *have* a family (or a job, for that matter), you're obsessed.

Apocrypha: You're probably very orthodox in your attempts to explain your mission and why you were called to it. Traditional notions of good and evil are fine by you. Onward Christian soldiers. Crush the infidels. Make the world a better place. Answers to "Why now?" vary from a cleansing in preparation for the Second Coming to a simple need for humanity to finally reclaim the Earth. By this sort of reckoning, the Messengers get construed as angels, the Holy Spirit or ancestor spirits.

Yet our kind tends to believe in one thing consistently: ourselves. Maybe that's why hunter "cults of personality" tend to have Avengers at their center. If you can ever get one of these cult leaders to be candid, odds are he'll tell you there are no Messengers, that the voices he hears are his own, that his powers are his "destiny." In all fairness, some of these folks are among the most effective hunters around — but having worshipers still makes you appear suspicious.

Stereotypes

Bystanders — Somebody *else* we'll have to avenge tomorrow. Stay home.

Defenders — While there's certainly value to having someone you can rely on to watch your back, these guys need to learn that the best defense is an ass-kicking offense.

Innocents — Figures it was one of these dumb-asses who went on TV and got himself wasted.

Judges — We can't stand around waiting for their famous "impartial decisions"; there's good and there's evil, and evil must be punished.

Martyrs — Like us, these guys are willing to die for the cause — but what good is dying if the cause fails?

Redeemers — Oh sure, let's "rehabilitate" monsters. *That's* the friggin' ticket. Idiots.

Visionaries — Yeah, yeah, "vigilance and vision," yada yada yada. Choose wrong and pay the price.

The Enemy — Evil is as evil does. And *when* it does, we come in and stop it dead.

The Imbuing: The call to Vengeance is always violent. Someone — or something — almost always dies, whether it's some civilian, his attacker or the hunter in question. You were "reborn" amid death and consecrated in blood. Is it any wonder that the hunters likeliest to fall to the enemy's level are your own kind?

Character Creation: Avengers usually possess high Physical Attributes, but can be weak or fearful people who bolster themselves with weaponry. For the latter, choose high Firearms ratings (and possibly the Arsenal Background), coupled with Wits and/ or Alertness to reflect these characters' view of the world as basically menacing. Outlaws and law enforcers are good starting concepts for this creed, though callously murderous individuals on either side of the law are not. Consider giving hunters who are cops or crooks the Contacts Background.

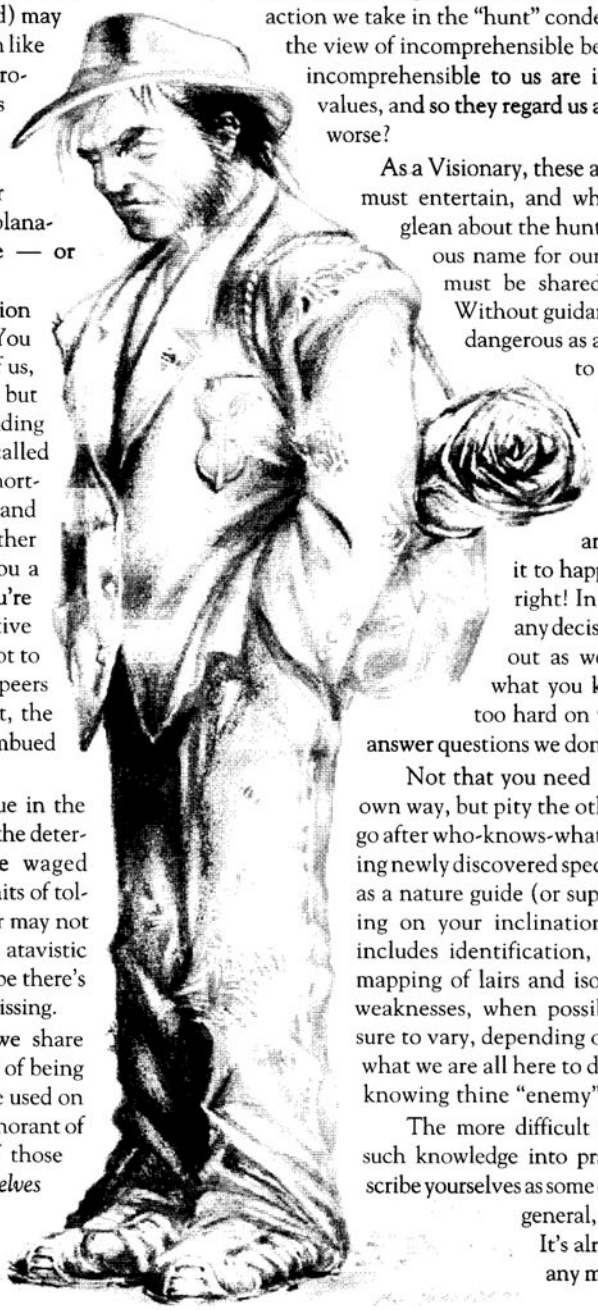
Starting Conviction: 4

A. K. A.: Adjusters, Knights, Soldiers, the Wrath of God; *Vengadores*

VISIONARY

Claiming a world is a simple-sounding, two-fold process: We must be patient and look carefully to discern our best path. And we must pursue that path heedless of obstacles, whether nefarious interference or the disbelief of our fellows. Neither impediment can keep us from our goals.

Consider the possibilities: that we and our opponents (if that's the right word) may be part of an evolutionary competition like the one between Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons; that both sides may be pawns in a conflict between alien intelligences; that we may embody the forces of light and darkness in a war for the fate of the world; that all these explanations of our struggle may be true — or completely false.



What every imbued person of Vision brings to the mission is perspective. You have your theories, as do nearly all of us, about what is happening around us, but Visionaries strive to make understanding essential to our activities. Judges get called on to render decisions that have short-term effects. You take the long view and weigh factors that never occur to other imbued — who probably consider you a lunatic as a result. No matter. If you're true to our calling, insults are ineffective in swaying your attitudes. Which is not to say we don't value the respect of our peers in this apocalyptic enterprise. In fact, the extent to which we influence other imbued is the measure of our own success.

But what success are we to pursue in the larger sense? Is the goal of our mission the determination of whether war can be waged compassionately? Is it defining the limits of tolerance when confronting what may or may not be pure evil? Or is it simply some atavistic contest for survival of the fittest? Maybe there's a whole other battlefield that we're missing.

The perceptions and abilities we share come to us seemingly for the purpose of being used. Presumably, they're meant to be used on entities whose existence we remain ignorant of until the coincidental bestowing of those abilities. But what if the entities *themselves* — our "targets" — are bestowing these powers? Does our aggression prove to them that with vast power comes vast immaturity? Does every action we take in the "hunt" condemn us and our species in the view of incomprehensible beings? Or is it that beings incomprehensible to us are incapable of sharing our values, and so they regard us as test subjects, vermin or worse?

As a Visionary, these are the questions that you must entertain, and whatever wisdom you can glean about the hunt — a potentially dangerous name for our mission, by the way — must be shared with other "hunters." Without guidance, our fellows can be as dangerous as anything they might seek to protect against. So, to pose another question: Are we the brains of this undertaking, its conscience? Yes and yes. And when some of us are proven wrong? Expect it to happen, for we cannot all be right! In that instance, hope that any decisions you influenced came out as well as they could, given what you knew. Anyway, don't be too hard on yourself. We're trying to answer questions we don't even know how to ask.

Not that you need ideas on how to go your own way, but pity the other imbued who literally go after who-knows-what. Think of them as stalking newly discovered species, and think of yourself as a nature guide (or supernature guide, depending on your inclinations). My own to-do list includes identification, tracking, classification, mapping of lairs and isolation of proclivities or weaknesses, when possible. Your emphases are sure to vary, depending on your interpretation of what we are all here to do, but the importance of knowing thine "enemy" is paramount.

The more difficult task is often translating such knowledge into practice. Many of you describe yourselves as some combination of diplomat, general, dreamer and baby sitter. It's already challenging to have any meaningful exchange with

other Visionaries, given our independent ways. Trying to marshal the divergent attitudes and approaches of the imbued overall can seem impossible.

Here's hoping we have vision enough to meet that challenge.

Weaknesses: Other hunters say we're all prone to narrowness of focus, and so they call us *Tunnel*-Visionaries. Of course, it's pointless to protest; we obviously *can* devote ourselves to certain minor details. How about that pamphleteer who keeps harping on the mutagenic properties of human saliva? And the way "monster particles" are spread by kissing? Gang, keep some emotional distance from your pet theories. Don't undermine your own authority by constantly focusing on fringe matters. Remember the big picture.

Addiction affects those of us who pursue comprehension of the Mysteries (Heralds, hunters, monsters) through mind-altering substances. Exercise moderation.

Visionaries who conclude that hunters are better off *not* hunting are typically called "traitors." Nevertheless, following our own vision of the truth is what we do, and a few of you believe humans are being used as catspaws at best and as entertainment — of the gladiator variety — at worst. Needless to say, some of our more eager counterparts consider any such stance blasphemy. If you decide inaction should be the group's new course of action, make sure there are no Avengers behind you when you make the announcement.

Apocrypha: Maintaining your composure can be difficult with all the crackpot ideas seeping into Visionary heads. A lot of them seem like plot rejects from *The Twilight Zone*: The Messengers are our future selves trying to prevent a mutant takeover of humanity in their past. Or, Hell is full and we're seeing the backflow. Or, stuff like this happens *every* thousand years, and Jesus was one of us. Or, the world is about to end and we have to choose a new one. Who can say who will be right till the last minute? What you do know is, no imbued is certain of his ultimate purpose. It's up to you to discover that purpose and seek alternatives to whatever ideas may become popularly accepted. Perhaps the world hunters should seek apart from monsters is neither this nor the next, but one of our own making.

Stereotypes

Avengers — Good or bad, they're the desire for justice personified.

Bystanders — Given the widespread urge to dismiss them as failed hunters, perhaps they deserve our scrutiny.

Defenders — They embody the instinct for self-preservation.

Innocents — Apprentices who often take on the characteristics of the others with whom they hunt.

Judges — Invaluable in the field, but possessed of limited imaginations.

Martyrs — At their best, the rarest of individuals: altruists.

Redeemers — Approaching the hunt as an epidemic to be quelled has merit; trying to explain it that way to a mass audience does not.

The Enemy — Antagonistic labels may predetermine our behavior in counterproductive ways, so keep an open mind.

The Imbuing: Visionaries love to trade first-time stories because our experiences tend to vary so much. This one distracted a creature so its victim could escape, that one tricked an attacker into destroying itself. My own "opener to the way" ended after it became apparent that the thing confronting me couldn't face its own reflection. The only constant to these tales appears to be how different Visionary solutions seem to be.

Character Creation: Although many Visionaries possess superior Intelligence, some are average in that department but excel at Manipulation — specifically at *seeming* to have powerful intellects. Leadership and Expression are appropriate Abilities for hunters of this creed. Visionaries sometimes have a concentration in Occult *or* Science, but an exceptional individual (or a charlatan) might straddle both fields.

Starting Conviction: 3

A. K. A.: Pathfinders, Wayfarers, Prophets; *Hellseher*

VISIONARY

Edwards
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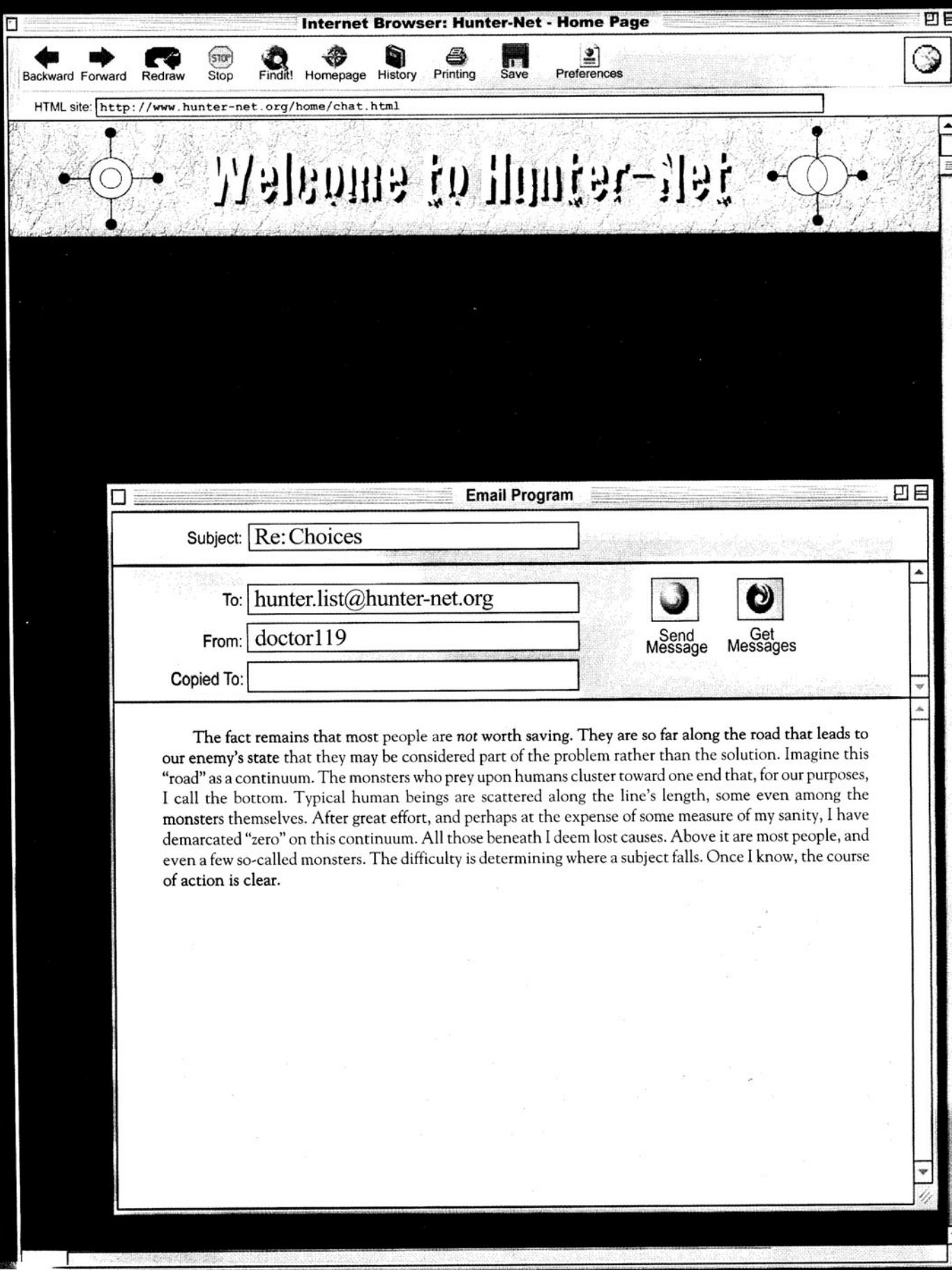
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The fact remains that most people are *not* worth saving. They are so far along the road that leads to our enemy's state that they may be considered part of the problem rather than the solution. Imagine this "road" as a continuum. The monsters who prey upon humans cluster toward one end that, for our purposes, I call the bottom. Typical human beings are scattered along the line's length, some even among the monsters themselves. After great effort, and perhaps at the expense of some measure of my sanity, I have demarcated "zero" on this continuum. All those beneath I deem lost causes. Above it are most people, and even a few so-called monsters. The difficulty is determining where a subject falls. Once I know, the course of action is clear.

CHAPTER 4: I HAVE HEARD THE MESSAGE (CREATION & TRAITS)

Now is the end come upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense upon thee all thine abominations.

— Ezekiel 7:3

All you keep thinking is, "It's not supposed to be this way." You had a normal life, or at least as normal as could be expected: a home or apartment, a job that demanded most of your time, probably a handful of friends and perhaps a family of your own or the siblings and parents among whom you grew up.

Life was difficult. Sometimes it threw curves at you that you couldn't deal with: accidents, deaths, hardships. Yet you persevered. What choice did you have? Nature demands that you survive no matter how cruel or even brutal the world gets.

But it was never supposed to be like this. One day you thought you had something of a handle on the way things worked. Your little piece of the world was under control. That's when you heard the voice: *"DEATH DESCENDS UPON YOU." Startled, you looked around to see who was talking to you — and you found yourself being drawn toward a dark corner. At first there was just a shadow; nothing to look at. You were even prepared to look away, until you came eye to eye with the* thing *in the darkness: a human shape, but with a face like nothing ever born of man. It returned your gaze — and shot desperate looks at others in the parking garage, other people who apparently saw it, too.*

That's when all hell broke loose. Nothing has been the same since. Life and the world as you knew them have no meaning anymore. Now you see things *everywhere you look. They feed off innocent people, steal their minds, bodies and souls. You want to look the other way, keep to yourself and return to the way things used to be. But you can't. Even if your conscience could let you ignore it all, the horrors keep coming and the voice in your head won't let you rest.*

Maybe you're insane. The people you love know something has changed, something is wrong with you. Ironically, you must now endure this new existence for them. If they can't see the truth, recognize the danger, then you have to contend with it for them. You have to protect them, whether they know it or not.

It's not supposed to be this way... but now it's all you have.

On the surface, **Hunter: The Reckoning** is about fighting monsters. Normal everyday people are confronted with the fact that abominations walk the streets and stalk the nights, feeding, harming, controlling and killing. A hunter's self-chosen task is to fight the forces of darkness.

All those things are true, but they're not what **Hunter** is *really* about. This game explores what happens to the individual person — you — when you realize that everything you've understood all your life is a lie. The government is not truly concerned about people, but about horrific forces that control it from behind the scenes. The first order of the business world is not to make money, but to support shadowy powermongers that deal in living currency. The human soul doesn't go to any reward after death, but returns to the world to torment the living.

But the worst lie of all is told to you from birth by your parents, by all the very people you trusted to protect and guide you. Monsters are real. They're everywhere. They control the world, and they have perpetrated every atrocity that you can imagine — and many that you can't.

How does this terrifying revelation affect your mind and identity? Who can you turn to? Not the authorities, the media or even friends. They could be in league with or be monsters themselves. Who can you confide in or trust? Not loved ones. They wouldn't believe you, or they might have you put away for your own good. Can you just hide from it all and hope it goes away? Not when things-that-should-not-be pass you every day, look you in the eye and haunt your dreams.

Ultimately, you have to decide what's truly important: your own comfort, or the safety of all the blind, deaf and defenseless people around you whose lives can be snuffed out in a instant by forces they cannot even comprehend.

Hunter is about you, about the human condition, about choosing to damn your own soul or condemn countless others. **Hunter** is about clinging to the tattered shreds of a false existence or confronting unspeakable evil and insurmountable odds to proclaim "Enough!"

Compared to that, fighting monsters is easy.

Character Creation

As a player of **Hunter: The Reckoning**, you must create a character — an alter ego through whom you interact with the game world and play your part in the story. Like a character in a novel or movie, this person is a protagonist in the stories you tell. Rather than make up a new character for each session, you create one richly detailed character, then assume the role of that person every time you play. As your troupe tells its stories, you watch your character grow and develop. Ultimately, your character becomes as real and timeless as a great hero (or villain) in a literary work.

This chapter describes how to create a hunter character, beginning with a general concept and translating that concept into the Traits and statistics that are used in the game. Though the process is relatively simple, and players can undertake it on their own, it's best to create characters with Storyteller supervision so she can answer questions and guide the creation process.

Traits

Much of your character's life comes from the way you describe and roleplay him. Your hunter's general disposition and attitude toward killing, as decided by you, might contribute toward his overall role in the story. However, certain aspects of a character — his physical prowess, his looks and his hunter powers, for example — are described in numerical terms and used in conjunction with the systems of the game. These features are called Traits. Traits quantify your character's particular strengths and weaknesses, which guide your character in his interactions with other players' characters and with the characters the Storyteller creates. For example, your character might have high Mental Traits, making him invaluable when brains and cunning are required. Yet he might have low Physical Traits, forcing him to rely on an ally when violence or brute force is called for.

Traits are commonly described in numerical terms with ratings between 1 and 5 (Virtues, Conviction and Willpower are exceptions to this guideline; they're rated 1 to 10). These numbers represent the quantity and quality of your character's prowess in a given Trait. One dot is considered a poor rating, while five dots indicate superiority. Think of Trait ratings as similar to the stars with which restaurants and hotels are rated — one is dismal, while five is excellent. Trait ratings become important when you roll dice to perform actions (see Chapter 6 for specifics).

Getting Started

The **Hunter: The Reckoning** character-creation system is designed along five basic precepts. Keep these in mind while generating the persona you assume in the World of Darkness.

- You may create a character of any age, from any culture and from any nation, subject to the Storyteller's approval. However, all characters begin the game as novice

hunters who have only recently been imbued; within a few days or perhaps a few weeks — enough time to be truly terrified by the new world they've discovered. They know relatively little of other hunters, save perhaps for ones with whom they were imbued, if any. This lowly starting point allows characters to experience the World of Darkness as it unfolds before them in all its malignancy and mystery, rather than having the lore of ages already under their belts.

• The character-creation system is intended more as a persona-development device than as a strict system of mechanical codification. Who wants more rules at the expense of an interesting character or a good story? Your character cannot exist as mere dots on a page — roleplaying is always more important than numbers.

• You have a certain number of points to spend on Traits that you would like your character to have. You also get "freebie points" at the end of character creation; you may spend them to round out your character, add personality and further differentiate your character from the other players' characters.

• A Trait score of 1 is poor, while a score of 5 is excellent. Thus, a character with a single dot in a Trait is either not very good with that Trait *or* is a beginner. Don't think that your character sucks because she has only one dot in Manipulation. The experience system presented on p. 140 allows your character to increase and improve her Traits. Traits are rated according to a human scale (except where Virtues, Conviction and edges are concerned; those are hunters' purview alone, as bestowed by the Heralds).

• It is your responsibility to take on a role not inherently detrimental to the troupe, your fellow players. Hunting is deadly. A character who tries her hand at it alone probably dies quickly. Hunters have a chance when they work together and pool their resources and powers. That doesn't mean they always get along, but characters should at least be able to tolerate each other.

Common Traits and Terms

Hunter characters comprise the following qualities:

Name: Your character's name — this may be anything from her birth name to a pseudonym. Some hunters go by code names, particularly online, to protect their true identities and loved ones.

Player: Your name.

Chronicle: This is the series of linked stories in which your character participates. The Storyteller will provide you with the name of the chronicle (though he may need your help deciding it!).

Attributes: Attributes define your character's inborn aptitudes and potential.

Abilities: Abilities are those proficiencies your character possesses intuitively or has learned.

Advantages: A catch-all term for the numerous benefits a hunter has over "normal" folk, Advantages refers to a collection of three other Traits. **Backgrounds** define your character's material assets and social network. **Virtues** portray your character's passion for the hunt, depending on how he approaches it. A check mark is made next to those Virtue points spent to acquire edges. **Edges** are the powers that your character receives upon being chosen. Some may be triggered or activated in manners unique to your character.

Derangements: Mental ailments or illnesses that your character may develop in his pursuit of the hunt, as a result of abandoning a normal human lifestyle.

Nature: This is the "true" personality of your character — who he is deep down.

Demeanor: This is the personality your character presents to the world. More often than not, Nature and Demeanor differ, especially if your character tries to separate his old and new lives.

Concept: Your character's concept is a one- or two-word "sketch" of who your character was prior to being imbued — anything from Accountant to Dumb Kid.

Primary Virtue: Your character's Primary Virtue is instrumental to and is determined by his creed. It indicates his ultimate purpose in the hunt.

Creed: Your character's creed indicates his philosophy toward reality as he has been confronted with it, and his approach to hunting the supernatural.

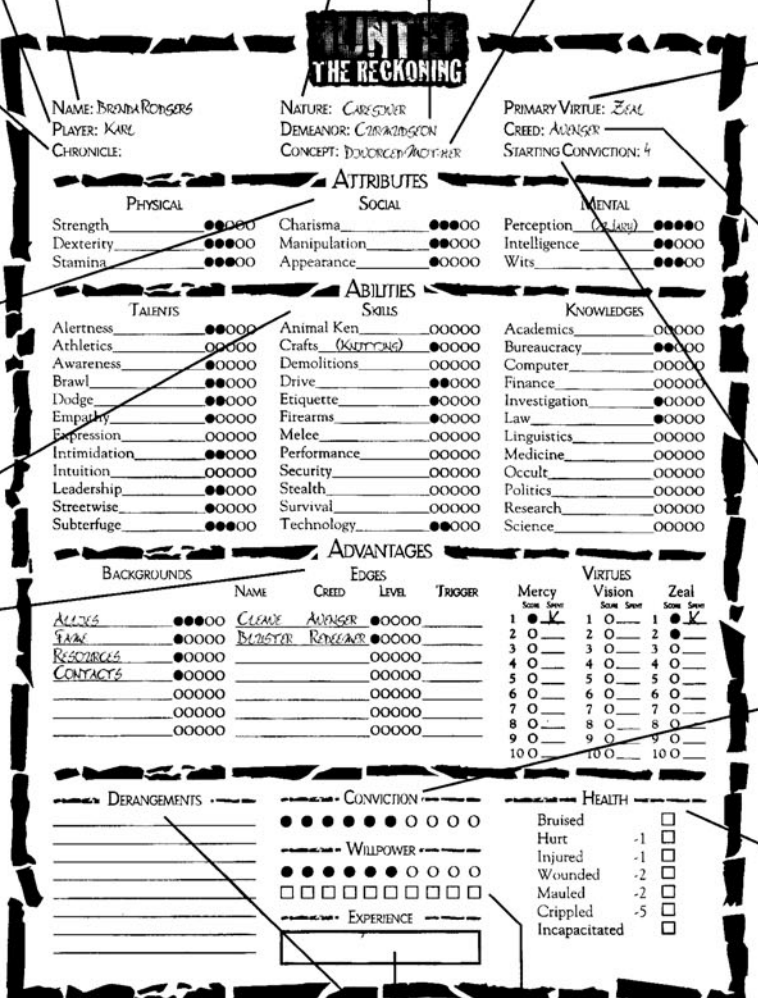
Starting Conviction: The number of Conviction points with which your character starts the game, as determined by his creed.

Conviction: Your character's endurance for the hunt and his energy reserve for using edges is measured by this Trait.

Health: Hunters are mortal people. They get hurt and die in the line of duty — a lot. The Health Trait measures how much injury your character has suffered.

Willpower: This Trait reflects your character's inner drive and desire to succeed at tasks he undertakes.

Experience: Your character's Experience Trait represents how much she has learned since being imbued. All characters begin the game with 0 Experience. Experience is spent to purchase new Traits.



Character Creation Process

- **Step One: Character Concept**

Choose concept, creed, Nature and Demeanor.

- **Step Two: Choose Attributes**

Prioritize the three categories: Physical, Social, Mental (6/4/3). Your character has one dot in each Attribute automatically.

Rate Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina.

Rate Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance.

Rate Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits.

- **Step Three: Choose Abilities**

Prioritize the three categories: Talents, Skills, Knowledges (11/7/4).

Choose Talents, Skills, Knowledges.

No Ability higher than 3 at this stage.

- **Step Four: Choose Advantages**

Choose Backgrounds (5), Virtues (3) and edges (according to your Virtue allocations).

- **Step Five: Last Touches**

Record Conviction (according to creed) and Willpower (a standard 3).

Spend freebie points (21). Traits can be raised to 4 or 5 at this time. Virtues and edges cannot be purchased with freebie points. Starting Conviction cannot be raised higher than 8.

Sample Concepts

- **Bureaucrat** — judge, public official, councilor, aide, speech writer, intern
- **Criminal** — jailbird, Mafioso, drug dealer, pimp, carjacker, thug, thief, fence
- **Drifter** — bum, prostitute, junkie, pilgrim, biker, gambler
- **Entertainer** — musician, filmmaker, artist, actor, model
- **Intellectual** — writer, student, scientist, philosopher, social critic
- **Investigator** — detective, beat cop, government agent, private eye
- **Kid** — child, runaway, outcast, urchin, gangbanger
- **Nightlifer** — club goer, skinhead, punk, barfly, raver, substance abuser
- **Outsider** — urban primitive, refugee, minority, conspiracy theorist
- **Professional** — engineer, doctor, computer programmer, lawyer, industrialist
- **Reporter** — journalist, news reporter, paparazzo, talk-show host, 'zine editor
- **Socialite** — dilettante, host, playboy, sycophant, prominent spouse
- **Soldier** — bodyguard, enforcer, mercenary, reservist, Green Beret
- **Worker** — trucker, farmer, wage earner, temp, day laborer

Creeds

- **Defense** — Protectors and *Defenders* who seek to salvage or preserve what they can in the war against the unknown, perhaps to prove that the fight is worthwhile.
- **Innocence** — The curious, unabashed and wide-eyed, the *Innocent* accept monsters on their own terms and seek simple resolution between creatures and humanity.
- **Judgment** — The eyes and ears of the battle against monsters, *Judges* seek to uphold the greater good, whether it means destroying creatures or sparing them and questioning other hunters' motives.
- **Martyrdom** — Acting out of desperate passion, *Martyrs* put themselves in harm's way to protect others or to alleviate some all-consuming guilt.
- **Redemption** — Piercing the souls of the enemy, *Redeemers* offer the hand of salvation to the deserving and strike down the irredeemable.
- **Vengeance** — Holy terror personified, *Avengers* accept only one end to the war: the destruction of the enemy.
- **Visionary** — Introspective, questioning and doubtful, *Visionaries* seek the ultimate goals of the war against the unknown, and they seek purpose for hunters as a whole.

Archetypes (Nature and Demeanor)

- **Addict** — You're hooked on something or someone.
- **Architect** — You build a better future.
- **Autocrat** — You need control.
- **Bon Vivant** — Life is for pleasure.
- **Bravo** — Strength is all that matters.
- **Caregiver** — Everyone needs nurturing.
- **Celebrant** — You exist for your passion.
- **Child** — Won't somebody be there for you?
- **Conformist** — You follow and assist.
- **Conniver** — Others exist for your benefit.
- **Curmudgeon** — Nothing is worthwhile.
- **Director** — You oversee what must be done.
- **Dreamer** — You aspire to lofty heights.

- **Fanatic** — The cause is all that matters.
- **Gallant** — You're not the showstopper, you're the show!
- **Gambler** — You play the odds in all things.
- **Pedagogue** — You save others through knowledge.
- **Penitent** — Past acts must be atoned for.
- **Perfectionist** — Nothing is good enough.
- **Rebel** — You follow no one's rules.
- **Rogue** — Those who can, win. Those who can't, lose. You can.
- **Survivor** — Nothing can keep you down.
- **Traditionalist** — As it has always been, so it shall be.
- **Trickster** — Laughter eases the pain.

Edges

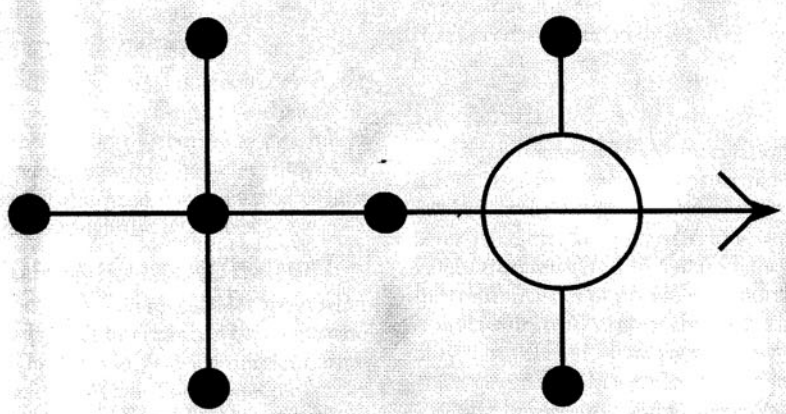
- **Defense Path** — Powers of protection and offense, derived from the Zeal Virtue
- **Innocence Path** — Powers of inquiry and evasion, derived from the Mercy Virtue
- **Judgment Path** — Powers of perception and balance, derived from the Zeal Virtue
- **Martyrdom Path** — Powers of sacrifice and retribution, derived from the Mercy Virtue
- **Redemption Path** — Powers of healing and condemnation, derived from the Mercy Virtue
- **Vengeance Path** — Powers of wrath and potence, derived from the Zeal Virtue
- **Visionary Path** — Powers of insight and direction, derived from the Vision Virtue

Backgrounds

- **Allies** — Nonimbued confederates, usually family or friends.
- **Arsenal** — Weapons and equipment at hand.
- **Bystanders** — Allies who witness the unknown but do not become imbued.
- **Contacts** — Sources of information or limited influence.
- **Destiny** — Your character has a fate appointed by higher powers.
- **Exposure** — Previous contact with the supernatural now useful as a weapon.
- **Fame** — How well known your character is among normal people.
- **Influence** — Your character's political power within normal society.
- **Mentor** — An *aware* person or group that advises and supports your character.
- **Patron** — Ongoing contact with the Heralds or other unknown forces.
- **Resources** — Wealth, belongings and monthly income.

Freebie Point Costs

Attributes — 5 points per dot
Abilities — 2 points per dot
Backgrounds — 1 point per dot
Willpower — 1 point per dot
Conviction — 1 point per dot (max starting score of 8)



The Storyteller and Character Creation

The Storyteller must guide the players through character generation, not only to ensure their understanding of the process but to get a feel for the characters they create. Character creation can provide Storytellers with some wonderful plot ideas — ones you might never have considered on your own. Likewise, if the players are unfamiliar with the rules, you should use character generation as an introduction to the game as a whole, informing the troupe how the rules work and giving them examples based on the personas they create.

As Storyteller, start by photocopying and handing out the character sheet from the back of the book. Take the players on a "tour" of the sheet, explaining what each section is for. Let players ask questions along the way, and help them through the process rather than make them fend for themselves.

Once the players are familiar with the character sheet, give them a few guidelines as to what types of characters will be appropriate for the chronicle. For example, Storytellers running games about the pervasiveness of being imbued might insist that someone play a very young character and someone play an elderly one. Sometimes, a player attempts to portray a character wholly unacceptable to your plotline. Feel free to disallow it in favor of a character who won't disrupt the game.

Storytellers are advised to spend an entire session simply creating characters and running preludes (see p. 219) with the players. Exceptionally complex characters or secretive chronicles might even warrant an entire session for each individual player. Spending an adequate amount of time on character generation ensures that the players create realistic characters, not vapid, colorless laundry lists of Traits.

After the mechanics of creation are done, take each player aside and lead him through a prelude or run all the characters' preludes at one time, depending on how you want the characters to meet (they might all be imbued simultaneously). Such a preliminary session is the players' introduction to the chronicle, as well as the means by which each adds final details to her character, so use the prelude to its greatest effect. In **Hunter**, the prelude is perhaps the most important event in the characters' lives; it's when they're chosen by the Messengers to awaken to the truth and corruption of the World of Darkness.

Step One: Character Concept

If you're familiar with the Storyteller system, a lot of this is old hat — though there are a few twists. If this is your first time playing a roleplaying or even a Storyteller game, the character sheet might be a little daunting and complicated. Don't worry, we walk you through it step by step.

Concept

The noun "character" can mean "a fictitious individual in a story." You create just such an individual for collaborative stories told with the Storyteller and the other players. Just as a novelist concerns herself with motivation, consistency and style, so should you.

"Character" can also mean a *quality* of personality. What drove Napoleon to conquer? What made Mata Hari become a spy? Why does Jimmy Buffet write so many songs about booze and food? The answers to all these questions — those people's drives, interests and motivations — are all aspects of *character*.

Your hunter should be more than just a clothes-horse on which you hang funky powers. The best characters in stories are the ones whose motivations are consistent and comprehensible. They may not be the best people — in fact, they usually aren't. But they feel real. Even if we don't like what Lady MacBeth does, even if we don't agree with Hamlet, we

tools and becomes hardened and cynical. Maybe he uses his skills as an actor to get close to his targets.

- Patriotism. A character with an abiding faith in a nation/ race/ ethnic heritage/ religious group can have a powerful reservoir of inner strength. On the other hand, new experiences as a hunter can challenge or warp that faith. Maybe a career soldier discovers that unnatural forces manipulate the military. Perhaps a Presbyterian minister is confronted with seeming proof that his beliefs about the afterlife are mistaken.

- The Immediate Good. Lots of people are motivated primarily by self-interest. This could be a truly selfish "I'm looking out for Number One and everyone else can go to hell" attitude or it could stem from a distrust of "global solutions." In any event, your character is most interested in the small scale, short term, here and now. Perhaps she has a family and protecting it is her first priority. Maybe she's a cop who feels protective toward her neighborhood beat. Or she's a [illegible] who doesn't want anyone — dead or alive —

You start out with one dot in each Attribute automatically, and distribute the additional six, four and three points in each category as you wish. A character may be strong and imposing, charming in a naive sort of way, but slow-witted. Or he may be brilliant and somewhat quick, but lacking in the social graces.

See p. 101 for more information on Attributes.

Step Three: Choose Abilities

Whereas Attributes measure your character's innate capacities, Abilities are capabilities that she's acquired throughout her life. There are three Ability categories: Talents, Skills and Knowledges. Talents are intuitive abilities that you learn in the school of hard knocks; they aren't learned from books or through trade schools, they're just things you teach yourself. Skills are Abilities that you learn through study and practice. Knowledges are more abstract and intellectual. As a rule of thumb, Knowledges deal with things you can remember, whereas Skills are things you can do.

Just as you prioritize Attributes, you also prioritize Abilities. One category gets 11 dots, another gets 7 and the last gets 4. A character who's naturally adept at a variety of tasks, who's picked up some trades, but who doesn't have the discipline for book learning probably prioritizes Abilities in the following order: Talents (11), Skills (7) and Knowledges (4). A character who has worked with his hands all his life probably focuses on Skills first, whereas a character who's dedicated his life to education concentrates on Knowledges.

Abilities do not receive free starting dots as do Attributes. You also cannot begin with any Ability above 3 at this point. If you want to push a particular Ability over the three-dot limit, you must do so with freebie points in step five.

See p. 105 for a full description of the Talents, Skills and Knowledges.

Step Four: Choose Advantages

Now comes the part of character creation during which you make your hunter truly unique. Advantages are Traits that flesh out your character's origins or that are bestowed (some might say inflicted) upon him when he is imbued. All of these Traits are tools of the hunt that may save a character's life and perhaps even be used to persevere over the creatures of the night.

Advantages are not prioritized; a set number of dots may be allocated to each category. Additional Advantage dots may be purchased with freebie points to acquire more Backgrounds. However, freebie points cannot be used to increase starting Virtues or edges.

Backgrounds

A beginning character gets five dots worth of Backgrounds, which may be distributed at your discretion. Backgrounds indicate what influences, contacts, friends and ties your character has. Most of these Advantages arise during your character's mundane life, before she becomes a hunter. However, hunters don't disappear from the world after becoming imbued. Your character may acquire new Backgrounds after coming to grips with her new existence. She might find newfound wealth by blackmailing a monster's pawn, or she could gain influence over a judge who suspects corruption among other city authorities.

Backgrounds should suit your character's concept. The Storyteller may refuse some and request that you take others based on his story.

More information on Backgrounds is on p. 119.

Virtues

Your character's determination to see monsters destroyed, passion to save worthy souls and hope to free the world of supernatural oppression are all measured with Virtues. There are three Virtues: Zeal, Vision and Mercy, all rated 1 to 10. Zeal determines your hunter's faith in himself, in his cause or in some belief that motivates him to take up and continue the fight against things-that-should-not-be. Vision indicates your character's awareness of options and possibilities under most circumstances; an awareness of the big picture at stake in the ongoing war. Mercy suggests your character's compassion and capacity for forgiveness, perhaps even for the most heinous and seemingly unrepentant of horrors; some souls are worth saving, even stained ones.

Each of the seven hunter creeds is assigned to one of these Virtues, based on the nature of the creed. Avenger, Judge and Defender belong to Zeal. Visionary belongs to Vision. Redeemer, Martyr and Innocent belong to Mercy. Creeds are assigned to these Virtues for game purposes; hunters never discuss having Virtues, just as they do not discuss possessing Attribute dots. The Virtue to which a creed is assigned is that creed's *primary Virtue*.

Virtues are awarded to or imposed upon your character when she is imbued. You have three starting points to spend in *any* of the Virtues. However, your rating in your character's "creed Virtue" — her primary Virtue — cannot be *exceeded by* her score in any other Virtue. Thus, a Defender's Zeal rating cannot be exceeded by her Vision or Mercy ratings — she could have 3 Zeal; 2 Zeal, 1 Vision and 0 Mercy; or one point in each. Likewise, a Redeemer's Mercy cannot be exceeded by her Zeal or Vision ratings.

Your character can earn dots in any Virtue as the game proceeds, but not before; she starts with only three points to allocate. Nor can you spend freebie points on Virtues during character creation. Even after the chronicle gets under way, your character's primary Virtue rating cannot be exceeded by the other two.

Virtues increase based on how wholeheartedly your character throws herself into the hunter mission. As Virtues increase, so does your character's access to hunter powers, edges. More information on Virtues is provided on p. 127.

Edges

Virtues are a measure of how far your character is willing to go in the cause against mankind's enemies. Those Traits also determine the types of edges — powers — that your character may wield. Your character's creed determines a path of edges that she may follow, called her *primary path*. Thus, an Innocent's primary Virtue is Mercy, and she may gain edges from the primary path of her creed, Innocence.

However, it is also possible to gain edges from the path of another creed, even one dedicated to another Virtue. Your character must have points in the appropriate Virtue to follow the edge path of another creed.

An Avenger with dots in Zeal may of course possess Avenger edges, those of his primary path. However, he may also possess powers from the Defender and Judge paths because those creeds belong to Zeal, too. If the same Avenger possesses a point in Vision, he may also have a Visionary edge. But, if the character has no points in Mercy, he cannot have an edge from any of the Redeemer, Martyr or Innocent paths.

Your character's progress in his primary edge path imposes restrictions on the edges he can have from other creeds' paths. His highest-rated edge from his primary path cannot be *exceeded* by any power from another path, whether of the same Virtue or not. Thus, if an Avenger has a two-dot edge in the Avenger path, he cannot have a three-dot power from any other path, whether from a Mercy, Vision or other Zeal path.

Edges are purchased with Virtue points. The purchase price of each edge equals its level rating. A level-one edge costs one Virtue point. A level-two Edge costs two Virtue points. You cannot purchase an edge without possessing all the previous ones in that path. Thus, your character must have the level-one Avenger edge before he can acquire the level-two Avenger edge. Possessing both costs a total of three Virtue points (all that a starting character receives).

Paths and edges are detailed in Chapter 5. Variations on spending Virtue points to acquire edges are detailed on p. 130.

Example of Virtues and Edges

Pauline is ready to assign Virtues and edges to her Visionary-creed character, Kara. Pauline gets three points to assign to Virtues. She can put all three in Vision, Kara's primary Virtue, and be very focused, but then her range of powers would be narrow. Pauline decides to invest one point in Vision, one in Zeal and one in Mercy for a broad base. She hopes to raise Kara's Vision score during play. Since no other Virtue exceeds Kara's Vision rating, the Storyteller approves.

Pauline can now buy edges. Her allocation of Virtues pretty much determines what Edges she can buy: a level-one power from each of Zeal, Vision and Mercy. The question is, from which creeds' paths does she choose her powers? She settles on the level-one Edges from Judge, Visionary and Martyr.

If Pauline had invested two Virtue points in Vision, she would have had only one other point to spend on Zeal or Mercy (let's say she would have chosen Mercy). When it came to buying edges, she could have afforded a level-one Mercy edge and only a level-one Vision power, too. Because edges cost their level in Virtue points, Pauline wouldn't have had the three Vision points necessary to get level-one and level-two Vision powers. She would have had to invest all three Virtue points in Vision to get the first two powers in Kara's primary path.

However, because increasing Virtue ratings grants more edges during play, Pauline would have been on her way to getting a level-two Vision edge by assigning two points to the Virtue. In the meantime, she would also have had a level-one Mercy power as "backup."

Step Five: Last Touches

Congratulations. By this point you have a fine collection of numbers that describes ability at a wide variety of tasks. However, the numbers are still lifeless without the intangible aspect of character to back them up. All the numbers, points, dots and Traits are like letters that haven't been formed into words. It's time to decide what that 3 Brawl Trait *means*. Did your character wrestle in high school, or is he a surly drunk who picks fights? Having "Ally (City Judge)" scrawled on a sheet says very little. How did your character come to have a city judge on her side? What's the nature of their relationship? Does the judge look down on her, is he afraid of her, does he feel indebted to her? How far would he go to help her out — and why?

Creating stories to explain your numbers is essential — but don't feel that you need the excuse of a Background or Knowledge to develop your character. What does he or she look like? How does your character talk? There's a list of questions on p. 93 intended to help you with fleshing-out, but the most important question is one you ask yourself: Why do I want to tell stories about this person?

Once you've developed your character's identity fully, you can fill out the remainder of your character sheet and spend a few more points toward the new vision of your hunter.

Conviction

Conviction measures your character's current momentum in his crusade against nightstalkers. Conviction increases and decreases constantly throughout a story as you spend points, risk points in edge rolls and regain them for successful efforts. Conviction is basically the energy reserve of hunter powers and hunter resolve. If Conviction ever falters or even plummets, your hunter is little more than a normal human with a gun and too much information — a very dangerous situation.

Your character's starting Conviction rating is listed in his creed description. Conviction can be increased with freebie points, but only to a maximum of 8 for starting characters. Your character's back-story should explain why he has so much vigor for the hunt when he has only recently been exposed to the reality of the world.

Conviction is explained further on p. 132.

Checks and Balances

If you do the math, you discover that it's impossible for your hunter to attain level-five edges. Virtues have a limit of 10. A character with a rating of 10 in any Virtue, and who possesses edges from only one path, can have no higher than a level-four edge. And yet there are level-five edges in the book!

Hunters don't know who or what touches (or torments) their lives with unadulterated visions of evil. Nor do they know who inflicts bizarre powers upon them — or exactly why, for that matter. What is clear is that evil reveals itself whenever people are imbued. The chosen coincidentally have the will and suddenly the means to respond. All aspects of hunter existence are mysterious, including the lengths to which they can go against the enemy and the heights to which their powers can take them. At least, they're mysterious for now.

Hunters who attain the heights of a 10 Virtue rating literally become vessels of the Messengers and the hunt itself. Their personal identities no longer seem to matter. All that's important is inheriting the Earth for humanity as a whole, apparently at any cost. Such veritable forces of nature *may* be able to attain level-five edges, but the means and consequences of doing so are currently beyond the scope and imagination of "lesser" hunters. However, time may tell for those hunters who organize against the enemy and survive to attain unprecedented power.

Willpower

Your character was a normal person until very recently. She spent all her life dealing with hardships, mishaps, jealousy, corruption, crime, ignorance, anger, temptation, greed and intolerance. You can't live without developing some resistance to it all. Willpower indicates your character's resilience and determination, once called upon simply to get through the day, but called upon now to survive it.

For hunters, Willpower is spent primarily to achieve automatic successes at actions that run the risk of failure. It's your character's concerted effort to make sure something happens, no matter what. Willpower is different from Conviction in that Willpower can be spent on only "mundane" actions — things your character could do without the aid of edges. Willpower has no effect on ensuring the use of your hunter's edges; only Conviction can be used to do that.

Starting Willpower is a standard 3 for all hunter characters — a reflection of the typical demands put upon normal people by the daily routine, and the resolve required to endure them. Starting Willpower can be increased with

freebie points to reflect a hard life before being imbued, or simply extraordinary personal determination or drive.

The applications of Willpower are detailed on p. 125.

Freebie Points

Once you have a firm idea of what your character is like, you can allocate 21 freebie points to pick up Abilities you might have missed, to buy additional Backgrounds or to jack up your Attributes. However, freebie points don't translate into dots on a one-to-one basis as do the points from other steps in the creation process. There's an exchange rate. (If you wonder why, it's because you use some Traits more often than others — Attributes versus Abilities, for example. This makes Attributes more valuable than Abilities, so they need to have different freebie point costs.)

Freebie points can be used to raise Ability scores to 4 or 5. Remember that you can't buy additional Virtue points or edges with freebie points, and Conviction cannot be raised higher than 8.

Freebie Point Costs

Attributes — 5 points per dot
Abilities — 2 points per dot
Backgrounds — 1 point per dot
Willpower — 1 point per dot
Conviction — 1 point per dot (max starting score of 8)

The Prelude

Despite the horrific revelations with which they're confronted, and the freakish, frightening powers that they suddenly manifest, hunters are normal people. Given the chance, they'd gladly return to their former lives, no matter how despairing, rather than continue to wage a war that may ultimately number them as losers, one by one. Yet they don't have that luxury and must continue on. So must your character.

Your character's ongoing bond with and fondness for his former life makes his prelude a formative stage in his development. The prelude is a one-time, quick game session in which you and the Storyteller, and perhaps the other players, establish who your character was — and what he becomes.

The decisions you've made about your character so far go a long way to establishing his former life. The prelude is a chance to portray that existence, if only briefly. It's the step that takes your character from a novelist's rough sketch to a fully developed protagonist.

The prelude also allows you to fill in blanks about your character that you might not have considered — where he went to school, his first girlfriend, where his old friends have moved to, his aspirations for the future as he understands it. Here's an opportunity to rearrange any dots or points on your sheet to better suit the identity you establish in the session (just make sure all your new points add up according to the rules).

Just when you're into character and feel comfortable with who you've created — BAM! — the Storyteller confronts you (and perhaps the other players) with the shuddering truth that monsters walk the streets, stalk the nights and prowl the unseen places — and here's physical proof right before your character's eyes.

Now, the prelude is particularly important because you, as a player, know that *something* is coming. (What game were you playing again?) It's essential to your own entertainment and that of the other players for you to forget everything you know about this game, its setting and any other Storyteller games with which you're familiar. For your purposes here and now, you're a wide-eyed fool who's just stepped through the gates of hell.

Your character is suddenly confronted by evil personified. While he gapes, trembles or wishes he could turn away, some voice, sign or revelation comes to him: THIS IS ANATHEMA. YOU ARE HOPE. From that point forward, his life is forever different. Everything he's always known and assumed is jarringly proved false. Reality has gone back to basics and this is the way of things from now on.

How your character reacts to the abomination before him is fundamental to what he becomes. You may have already created your character and know what kind of hunter you will be. For now, though, you know nothing. Every action you undertake is by instinct and is strictly monitored by the Storyteller. For all your character knows, everything wrong in the universe manifests before him in one brief instant and it's for him to deal with it. Enjoy the chaos, blood-chilling terror and absolute rage that follows.

Your Storyteller might reveal your powers or might withhold them completely. He might portion out Conviction points like a starving man sharing bread, or he might offer up nothing. Attacking the creature may not be an option, but discussion could be. Perhaps saving others is your character's goal. Then again, an ingenious solution to the situation might befall him. Your response should suit the type of character you've created, and perhaps the type of hunter you want to play. If your character's reaction to the walking corruption contrasts with your original hunter vision, you may want to revise your character from top to bottom, perhaps choosing a completely different creed.

The Storyteller also has the option of limiting your character-creation process. He may restrict you to designing the human your character has always been. You create an everyday person. Creed is assigned based on your reaction to the evil before your character in the prelude. A violent response suggests an adherent of Zeal. Saving others, pitying the abomination or putting yourself in harm's way hints at Mercy. Inventing creative solutions or attempting negotiation with this stultifying corruption indicates Vision. (Then

again, the Storyteller may completely throw a curve and arrive at your character's creed by some other bizarre means.)

The bottom line is that the prelude is the litmus test for your character's future, here on the slippery slope to the worst that reality has to offer. This moment of truth will stay with your character forever, and should stay with you as the yardstick by which your character's identity and humanity are measured in every story.

Questions and Answers

Your character is your proxy in the World of Darkness. To make him consistent and memorable, you have to know him well — his motivations, goals, fears, desires and values. Making decisions is easy when you understand your character. Even if you know that a certain action isn't the smartest course, it's worth the risk to stay in character.

The following questions help you establish a little more background for your character and help you understand him more fully.

• What scares your character most?

This is a horror game, after all. Understanding your character's fears not only makes him more sympathetic, it can make the game more entertaining. *Vertigo* wouldn't be such a good movie if the hero was casual about heights. A character who isn't afraid of anything isn't just boring (and unrealistic), he limits your opportunities for heroic actions. It's not a lack of fear that makes a man brave; having no fear is just stupid or crazy. The brave man is the one who *overcomes* his fears.

• What's your character's idea of the perfect lover? How about the perfect one-night stand?

What attracts us and what makes us happy are often two entirely different things. What type of person would make the best significant other/ spouse/ life partner for your character? Does she know anyone like that? If so, why hasn't she made a move?

• What's your character's idea of a really fun time?

Life is not unremitting doom and gloom, even for hunters in the World of Darkness. A chronicle with nothing but bad news and misery is almost as boring as one full of relentless cheer. By knowing what your character enjoys, you empathize and fully enjoy the good times instead of just gritting your teeth to get through the bad times.

• Does your character have a favorite book or movie? What is it?

It's a simple question, but it can reveal a lot about what your character admires and what interests her. Someone who is deeply affected by *The Exorcist* is a lot different from someone who really loves *Snow White*. Your character's tastes in stories reveals a lot about her aesthetic in general — whether she revels in tense, exciting situations or prefers a warm, cheerful setting or clean, classic qualities.

• Was your character religious and/ or superstitious before he heard the call? What about after?

This question makes you consider your character's attitudes about ideas beyond what he can see and grasp. Does he believe in God? If so, is it a frowning, anthropomorphic, white-bearded patriarch who can give one man good fortune and strike down the next? Is it a fuzzy, feel-good pagan Earth Mother? An abstract principle of initial creation? None of the above? Most importantly, how does the revelation of monsters moving among humans affect your character's beliefs?

• Your character has now been confronted by beings outside "scientific reality." What does he think they are? What does he think the Messengers are?

This question not only gives you a framework for future conclusions about the unliving, it indicates whether your character is logical and scientific, intuitive, or that he follows "gut feelings."

• What's your character's greatest regret? What accomplishment gives him the most pride?

This pair of questions shows your character at his best — and worst. We tend to regret things that not only made us unhappy, but which we could have handled better. (You may feel sorrow if your house is destroyed in a mudslide, but you're unlikely to *regret* it the way you regret stupidly blowing it with a really terrific girlfriend.) Similarly, something your character is proud of was probably accomplished by use of his skills, drive and brains. These questions can illuminate strengths and weaknesses of personality.

• What is your character after?

Everyone has goals — including your hunter. "Death to the walking dead" is an answer — but what was your character pursuing *before*? Is he willing to abandon his previous life and ambitions to become a full-time stalker of night-creatures? If he is, what do his friends and family think? If he tries to continue his old life while exploring the dark new one that's been thrust upon him, can he balance them? How does he plan to keep his loved ones safe — and in the dark?

A Final Note

A character without motivation might as well not survive her first encounter with monsters — or even be awoken to their existence. Knowing what drives your character is central to understanding who she is. A hunter's values are often very different from the values of her previous life, or from ones of people with normal lives. Exposure to horrid reality works a great change on an individual's personality. Think about where your character has been and where you'd like to see her go (or where she would like to go). Consider her Nature and Demeanor — do they suggest an ultimate goal? Once you have an idea of what it is your character wants to achieve, you're one step closer to making her a full-fledged personality of her own.

Example of Character Creation

Karl's Storyteller, Gwen, wants to run a **Hunter** chronicle set in their home town of Rock Island, Illinois. Rock Island and its surrounding towns grew rapidly during the '60s and early '70s, with an economy propelled by a local military base and a number of farm-machinery factories, and by being at the juncture between a major highway and the Mississippi River. The gas crisis changed all that, though. Factories closed, unemployment bred crime, and jump-starting the economy with riverboat gambling didn't work out as intended. Criminals from Chicago discovered that a three-hour ride could change their jurisdictions and a lot of them decided to stay.

Gwen wants to run a purist game: Karl can make up any ordinary person that he wants. Gwen will take it from there and decide on creeds, Virtues and an initial edge or two for Karl's character based on how he or she responds to a confrontation with the stuff of nightmares.

Step One: Concept

Karl decides he wants to play someone who's really different — a drastic change from the buff heroes of action movies and the accomplished agents on *The X-Files*. To really exercise his imagination, he decides his character is going to be past 50 — and a woman. He names her Brenda Rogers. She's a working-class, divorced mother of four, grandmother of one. She has a high-school diploma and works at a manufacturing plant, where she assembles plastic machine components. She's respected in her neighborhood because she sticks up for people. This local renown is offset somewhat by her temper, however.

If Gwen had given Karl free reign, he would have chosen Brenda's creed, too.

Karl can choose Archetypes now. He settles on Caregiver for Brenda's Nature, in keeping with her family values and devout loyalty to her children. Curmudgeon seems to suit her Demeanor best, an image Brenda conveys to keep people in line and to discourage others from making trouble for her. Of course, the latter may change drastically once Brenda is imbued.

Step Two: Choosing Attributes

Karl is tempted to make Brenda's primary category Physical, but he can't quite justify it for a grandmother in her 50s. He decides on Mental instead; Brenda's not really well educated, but she's no dummy. Physical is secondary. Social comes third.

He puts two dots in each of Perception and Wits, figuring that Brenda is sharp and nobody's fool. Her actual book smarts are average, so he assigns one dot to Intelligence and puts yet another in Perception. With the first free dot included, her Perception is four dots — pretty good. (Brenda could have a specialty in Perception — see

p. 101 — but Karl waits till after the prelude to determine that kind of fine detail.)

As for Physical Attributes, Karl decides that Stamina and Dexterity are more important than Strength. Brenda's job doesn't involve heavy lifting, but does require her to stand on her feet eight hours a day and make a lot of quick hand movements. He puts two dots in each, leaving Strength at the one dot gained automatically.

For Social, Karl assigns a dot to each of Manipulation (since that's how Brenda keeps her kids in line) and Charisma (because he pictures her as a forceful personality). He decides that Brenda was never exactly a hottie, and that divorce, money troubles and line work have reduced her to plain homely. This leaves him another dot to place, and he puts it in Charisma as well. She's not much to look at, but you do look at her when she speaks.

Step Three: Choosing Abilities

Prioritizing Abilities, Karl decides on Talents, Skills, then Knowledges. Brenda hasn't had opportunities to acquire a lot of Knowledges. He decides that she's more of a Talent than a Skill person, so he puts the bulk of points in Talents.

Alertness gets two points; it helps keep Brenda's fingers out of the conveyor belts at work. She also gets two points in Brawl, courtesy of her temper (and that of her ex-husband). Another two points go to Dodge — with four kids in a tiny living space, she needs it. Her kids give her a point of Empathy... and two points of Intimidation. Karl adds a point of Streetwise (since Brenda wants to keep her daughters away from "the wrong element"). With one point left, Karl decides to assign it to Awareness, just in case.

As for Skills, Karl puts two in Drive, two in Technology — gained by adjusting equipment at work — and one in Firearms. When Gwen asks why Gramma Rogers needs to pack heat, he explains that her ex-husband had a gun. Brenda learned to shoot during the divorce so that she could spite him by keeping the gun in the settlement. A point in Etiquette (to help Brenda get out of trouble with her temper) and a point in Crafts (she knits) round off Skills.

For Knowledges, Karl puts two in Bureaucracy, figuring Brenda may have spent a month on unemployment at one time or another. Snooping on her children and her ex gives her a dot in Investigation. She also has one in Law (mostly from divorce proceedings, but she's had to learn how to make bail once or twice).

Step Four: Choose Advantages

Karl now has a firm sense of Brenda: She's a little bit pushy and bossy (he makes a note to put a dot or two in Leadership later), so most of her Backgrounds have to do with people she knows. He takes two Allies — her brother Neil and her oldest daughter Connie — and one point of Fame (Karl decides that people in Brenda's immediate neighborhood know her, mostly for her legendary fights with her ex-husband Kelly). He also gives her a point of Resources, just so she won't be destitute. Karl asks Gwen if Brenda needs more to own a small house in a lousy neighborhood. She assures him that one point is sufficient. With his final Background point, Karl buys yet another point of Allies — Brenda's obedient 16-year-old son Steve.

Now would normally be the time for Karl to choose Brenda's Virtues and resultant edges. However, that's Gwen's purview for the purposes of this chronicle; Karl has no idea what's coming.

Step Five: Last Touches

After thinking about how each capability and Trait originates in the life he's imagined, Karl has a pretty good idea of what's going on with Gramma Rogers. He pictures her as a short, dense woman — not quite built like a fireplug, but close. She usually wears shapeless housedresses or sweat suits and hasn't put on high heels for a decade. She's 56 years old and her kids are widespread. Connie, the oldest, is close to 40. ("So she had a kid when she was a teenager?" Gwen asks. Karl nods.) Her next two children were also daughters — Linda, age 20, and Jeanette, age 18. Steve is the baby of the family, but Jeanette is the real troublemaker.

Gwen asks why Brenda started having kids again at age 36. Karl thinks a moment, then responds, "Well, Kelly really wanted a son. When the marriage started getting worse, she hoped babies would hold them together." Gwen nods. "So why is there such a gap between Connie and Linda?" Without even thinking, Karl says "Oh, Connie's from her *first* marriage." When asked how that one ended, Karl decides that Brenda's first husband (her high-school boyfriend Rick) died in a car wreck.

Gwen then wants to know why Connie, Neil and Steve count as Allies while other family members don't. Karl thinks, decides that Connie was always a smart kid, got a college scholarship and is now a reporter for the local paper. As for Neil, he's a state trooper. Steve's a good boy — not real bright, but obedient (bless his heart). He's a wrestler, so that keeps him out of trouble. It's Jeanette who's the problem child — 18, man-crazy and eager to move out of the house while she still knows everything.

Brenda starts with the standard 3 Willpower for now.

She has no starting Conviction as far as Karl knows, since she has not yet been assigned a creed.

Karl has 21 freebie points to play with. He goes back to pick up two points of Leadership (which costs four freebie points). He takes three dots of Subterfuge (from putting up with Kelly's and Jeanette's lies), which costs six points. Karl reconsiders Brenda's Strength and decides to purchase another dot, which costs five freebie points (raising so many kids has simply made her stronger). Brenda should have some Contacts, too. Who? Kelly, of course; something of a lowlife, but not without charm. She can occasionally shake a favor out of him in return for cutting some slack on alimony payments. Karl spends one freebie point on the Background.

Since Brenda has put up with so much trouble and hardship, Karl decides that she should have a few extra points of Willpower. He spends three freebie points there, for a total of 6 Willpower. Conviction also sounds cool to Karl; he wants Brenda to take up any future cause just as passionately she has every other in her life. He sets aside two freebie points to get two more Conviction, later. Gwen frowns at the last choice, but accepts it given Brenda's status as a neighborhood champion (Brenda surely never dreamed of just how far that self-appointed role would go).

Example Prelude

Gwen runs a concurrent prelude for Karl and two other players in the troupe (one has chosen a burly party animal from a local college, the other a potbellied criminal lawyer). Switching from character to character, Gwen goes through their daily routines. Karl's character gets the kids ready for school, then goes off to work. The college student attends a few classes, while the lawyer goes to the office. Gwen is clever enough to engineer several "near misses" for them — Brenda and the student go to the same sandwich shop for lunch. In the course of roleplaying, the two players decide that Brenda knows the student's mom. The lawyer graduated from the student's college, so the alumnus stops by campus to return a book to the library. Brenda and the lawyer nearly run into each other in downtown Rock Island: He's going to the liquor store, and she's dropping off a load of laundry.

The near misses build some tension among the players. They know *something's* coming, but not what or when. The college student goes off to his weekend job — bouncer at a local bar called Safari. The lawyer has dinner with a potential client. Brenda gets home and finds out that Jeanette has snuck out of the house, despite being grounded.

A furious interrogation of her kids and a few neighbors turns up Jeanette's likely destination: a sleazy dive called Safari. Good and mad by now, Brenda gets in her car and drives off — running a red light in her haste and forcing the lawyer to slam on his brakes as he drives home from dinner. His car stalls and won't restart, forcing him to look for a pay phone. The only places on the street that look even vaguely open are Safari and something called "Video Slut Hut — Live Nude Dancers!" He decides on Safari.

Brenda gets past the bouncer without paying a cover by saying, "It'll just take me a moment to go in and get my *underage* daughter." The college student lets her by and Brenda immediately begins scanning the bar for Jeanette. She spots her in a corner, snuggled up to a leering guy in leather pants and a silk shirt. Gwen asks for a Perception roll, checks Karl's result and tells him:

"The guy doesn't look like he's local — too polished, too well-dressed, too good looking to be skulking around a dive bar. Then, for a timeless moment, he looks completely different. He's not handsome — he's horrible, with burning eyes and pallid, rotten skin. He smiles at your daughter and you can see jagged pointy teeth set in receding black gums. His clammy, bony hand slides down her shoulder toward her breast.

"Suddenly, you realize that the bar is silent, even though everyone still seems to be talking and drinking. It's like you've been struck deaf, except for a voice — your own, but not, like when you hear yourself on a tape recorder: "IT FEEDS UPON YOUR CHILD. SALVATION RESTS IN YOUR HANDS."

"Then time and sound catch up with you again. The thing clutching your daughter turns to look you dead in the eyes — and sees to your very soul."

Karl declares, "I grab a pool cue and plant it in the middle of the bastard's skull!"

Since Brenda's first instinct is to attack the creature, Gwen decides that Brenda is an adherent of the Zeal Virtue, perhaps an Avenger. The first-rank Vengeance ability Cleave seems appropriate to assist her action.

Gwen turns to the student's player, "You see that woman grab a pool cue and head off toward the corner with a mean look in her eye. Suddenly you realize there's something vile and decaying there — but moving — and that she's closing in on it. You wonder if the cue is smoldering in her hands!"

The bouncer decides to move in closer to find out what's going on — and what the hell that *thing* is. That's when he's strangely drawn to the bar's back door. Not the door precisely, but the sign above it that reads: "EXIT. NOW!" Then it's all clear to him. He has to get the woman and that... *guy*... out of the bar. That way, there'll be no trouble inside and he can find out how *it* got past him.

Just then, the lawyer enters to use the phone and stumbles upon the scene. No one in the bar seems to realize what's going on, but it's clear as day to him. His first thought is to get the customers away. Nightmarish images of violence and rage race through his mind; people being torn to pieces as some monster lashes out in fury. "Fire," the lawyer yells. "Everyone get out! Fire!" The crowd responds immediately and floods screaming toward the main doorway.

Grotesque violence ensues in the corner. It ends only after several bar patrons are injured (including the lawyer) and the creature escapes. Thanks to Brenda, it leaves with a mangled left arm.

Once an eerie calm settles across the bar, Brenda, the college kid and the lawyer realize that they're the only ones left inside — and that only they seemed to understand what was really going on. It isn't difficult to recognize their connection when they almost simultaneously ask a gamut of questions: "What was that thing?" "What the hell just happened?" "What did I just do?" "Where did it go?" And... "Where's my daughter?"

The last question is the most telling. Once the terror and uncertainty subside, it's clear that Brenda's daughter is not among the bar refugees. She must have left with that.... But who can help Brenda find Jeanette? The mother is already in trouble for what's happened here; sirens sound in the dis-

tance. No one will believe what she saw or heard. Who can she turn to but — the only other people who stood with her! Acting without thought for the second time tonight, she grabs the others by the arm and pushes them toward the back door.

"Come on! My daughter is with that monster! You're the only ones who can help!"

And so it begins.

Aftermath

After this prelude, the players get their **Hunter** chronicle under way. Their characters take their first plummeting step into a world of despair that they've never known. Now is the time for Karl and the other players to fill in any missing details on their character sheets or to make any changes that better suit the personas they've just played.

Gwen has decided the characters' creeds based on their first instinctive reactions to the monster they encountered. Brenda has proved herself an Avenger for her violent response, the college student a Visionary for expressing curiosity and creativity, and the lawyer a Martyr, Redeemer or Innocent. Gwen settles on Innocent for his desire to protect the safety of the bar patrons.

The players could certainly request changes to their assignments. Karl could ask that Brenda be a Defender instead; Brenda's violent action was simply the result of her instinct to protect her child. Gwen is free to agree to such changes or enforce her decisions. After all, did the *characters* have any choice in what confronted them, or in how it will affect their lives thereafter?

Once creeds are settled, Gwen assigns the characters' starting Conviction ratings. Brenda is finally decreed an Avenger, so her Conviction rating is 4, increased to 6 thanks to the freebie points set aside for Conviction.

Since Virtues and edges weren't chosen before the prelude, they can be now that creeds are known. As an Avenger, Brenda's primary Virtue is Zeal. Karl gets three Virtue points to spend. He wants Brenda to be relatively focused, so he assigns two points to Zeal and one to Mercy to reflect her Caregiver Nature.

Now that Virtues are chosen, Karl chooses edges. Brenda's two points of Zeal are enough to purchase only a level-one edge from any of the Avenger, Defender or Judge paths (three Zeal points would be required to acquire a level-two Edge). Because Gwen already assigned Brenda Cleave in the prelude, she makes Karl keep that edge. (Karl could also acquire another level-one Zeal edge — from either the Defense or Judgment path — with his remaining Zeal point if he wanted to; see Spending "Unused" Virtue Points, p. 130, for variations on buying powers.)

Karl also has 1 Mercy, so he can buy a level-one power from any of the Redeemer, Martyr or Innocent paths. Karl decides that Brenda is in this horrific mess because she wants to turn Jeanette around, so Karl chooses the first Redeemer power.

Gwen ascertains that Brenda's primary Virtue, Zeal, is not exceeded by any other Virtue rating. Gwen also confirms that Brenda's highest rated edge in her primary path is not exceeded by any other edge ratings. The Storyteller is satisfied by Karl's assignment of powers.

Brenda is now complete and may proceed into a terrifying life made bearable only with the protection and salvation of her family.

Personality Archetypes: Nature and Demeanor

Everyone plays a role, often several, every day. Every individual displays multiple layers of personality, varying from the contrived to the sincere. Each of these roles defines how we interact with the people and places around us, and we choose which parts of ourselves we wish to show.

It is the same with hunters. The concept of Nature and Demeanor corresponds directly to the different masks we wear when we interact. Your **Hunter** character's Nature is her true self, her innermost being — the person she truly *is*. It is dangerous to show this, though, as it lets others know who we are and what is important to us. Thus, your character also has a Demeanor, a face he shows to the world. By choosing how we relate to the world, we are able to choose how it relates to us; we guide the responses others give us.

Nature and Demeanor are usually strikingly different for the imbued. Trying to maintain any semblance of a normal life — and then confronting the unknown — makes for a schizophrenic existence. Maintaining contrasting Natures and Demeanors helps draw the lines between identities: every-day person versus potential killer. And yet there are those who take the hunt so far that it consumes all of their identities. Nothing else has meaning to these people, who develop the same Nature and Demeanor — and are watched closely by their allies for signs of going too far and becoming a liability

Even if your character strives to show separate faces to the world, the lines must sometimes blur. The shadows and their agents are everywhere, operating by night and day. They can be at work, on the street, at the gym or even in the home. The truly wary never let down their guard and frequently wear their hunter face for fear of showing weakness — which could lead to death.

Philosophy and psychology aside, personality has an effect on **Hunter** mechanics. Your character may regain her drive and sense of purpose by acting in accordance with her Nature. Every time your character fulfills the requirement of her Nature Archetype (see below), she is eligible to regain a point of spent Willpower (see p. 125). Your character regains the point if the Storyteller allows it.

Archetypes allow you to build a sense of personality for your character, and to define a bit of what makes her tick. Yet Archetypes are not rigid; characters need not devote them-

selves slavishly to their Natures and Demeanors. Rather, your character should act as you reasonably or emotionally believe she *would* act in a given situation. You should come up with your own Archetypes that more closely define how your character responds to her world. After all, every character is an individual, and customized Archetypes are a logical outgrowth of a well-rounded character.

Here are some basic character Archetypes, suitable for beginning play.

Addict

The Addict simply can't get enough of a good thing. Unlike the Bon Vivant, who finds pleasure where she can, the Addict turns a specific pleasure into an obsession, giving it up only for a stronger urge. Obviously, this may be a narcotic, but it can also be a certain person, place or activity that has significance. Gamblers, workaholics and stalkers are all good examples of the Addict Archetype.

— Regain Willpower when you are able to gorge yourself on your chosen passion.

Architect

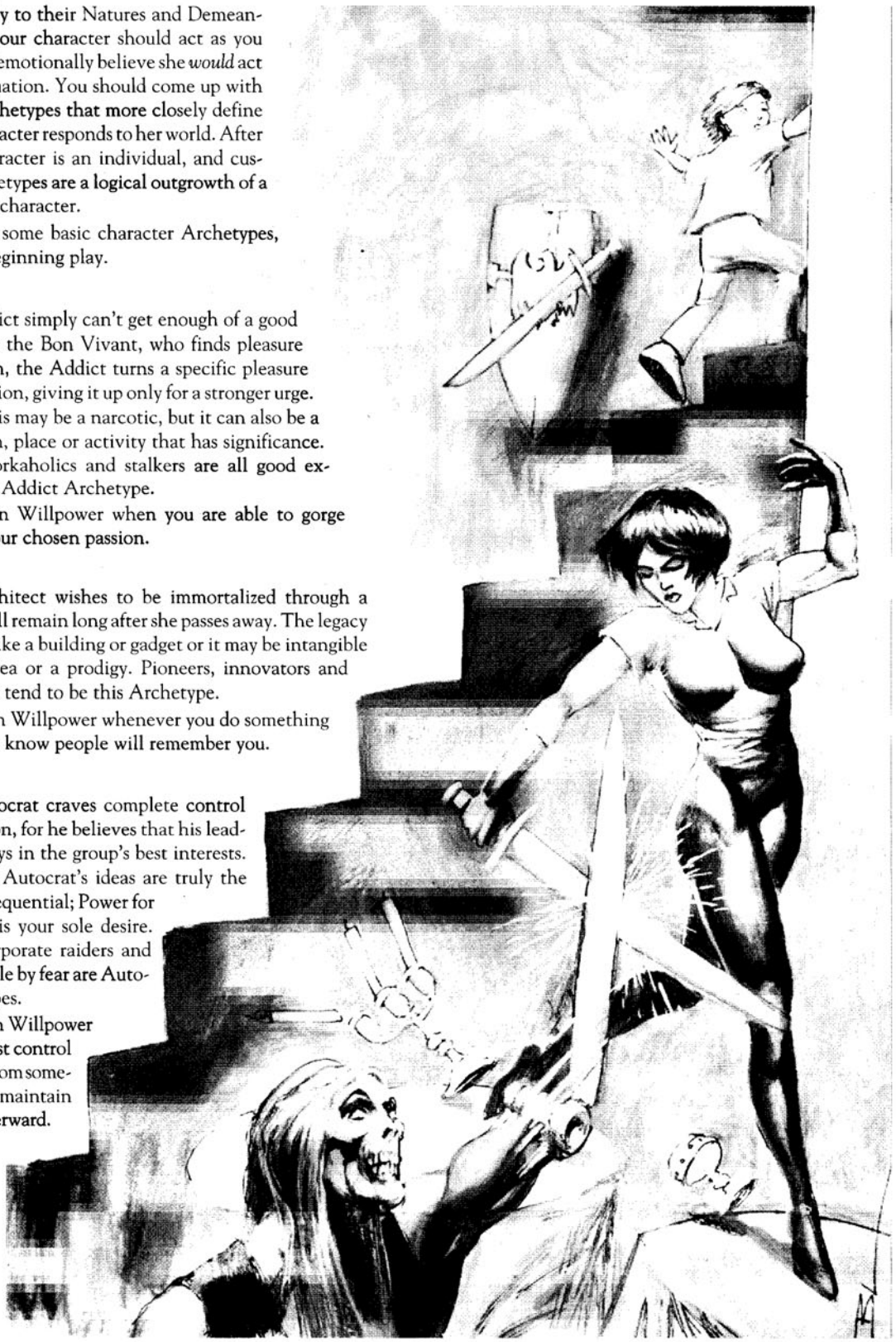
The Architect wishes to be immortalized through a legacy that will remain long after she passes away. The legacy may be solid like a building or gadget or it may be intangible like a new idea or a prodigy. Pioneers, innovators and entrepreneurs tend to be this Archetype.

— Regain Willpower whenever you do something for which you know people will remember you.

Autocrat

The Autocrat craves complete control over a situation, for he believes that his leadership is always in the group's best interests. Whether the Autocrat's ideas are truly the best is inconsequential; Power for power's sake is your sole desire. Dictators, corporate raiders and people who rule by fear are Autocrat Archetypes.

— Regain Willpower when you wrest control of a situation from someone else and maintain command afterward.



Bon Vivant

The Bon Vivant knows that her time on Earth is limited, so she tries to enjoy it while she can. The Bon Vivant always seeks excess and instant gratification, sometimes to the point of neglecting duty or common sense. Dilettantes, hedonists and many teenagers are the Bon Vivant Archetype.

— Regain Willpower when you shirk a responsibility in order to have a good time, which you feel more than compensates for whatever consequences may result.

Bravo

It doesn't matter how the Bravo gets his way, whether physically or verbally, as long as he gets it by knocking someone else down. Bravos take pleasure in displaying their power first-hand to people they don't respect. The Bravo is not necessarily devoid of compassion, he just prefers the strong-arm method of getting things done. Commandos, thugs and tough-guy cops are all Bravo Archetypes.

— Regain Willpower when you get your way by cowing an opponent (or an ally).

Caregiver

The Caregiver is a welcome harbor in a sea of evil. She takes pride in being a crutch for others to lean on in times of trouble. Caregivers are not suckers, however, and will not help people whom they feel do not deserve their aid. Doctors, social workers and parents are all examples of the Caregiver Archetype.

— Regain Willpower when you aid someone who truly needs it, especially at some cost to yourself.

Celebrant

The Celebrant takes joy in her cause. Whether the character's passion is battle, religious fervor, foiling her rivals or reading fine literature, it gives the Celebrant the strength to withstand adversity. Given the chance, the Celebrant indulges in her passion as deeply as possible. Unlike the Fanatic (p. 100), the Celebrant pursues her passion not out of duty, but out of enthusiasm. Crusaders, hippies, political activists and art enthusiasts are Celebrant Archetypes.

— Regain a point of Willpower whenever you pursue your cause or convert another character to the same passion. Conversely, lose a point of temporary Willpower whenever you are denied your passion or it is completely unavailable to you.

Child

The Child Archetype can show two different faces. On the one hand, he may be the epitome of *The Little Prince*: innocent, questioning, untouched by the world's pettiness. On the other hand, he may be an immature, selfish creature who demands a sort of dependence on others. Many Child Archetypes such as children and the idle rich show a bit of each face.

— Regain Willpower when your unsullied perspective uncovers an answer that more world-weary people have overlooked. Alternatively, regain Willpower when you get your way through mulish stubbornness.

Conformist

The Conformist is the backbone of any group — seldom making any plans herself, but following those of a competent leader to their completion. Conformists aren't really sheep; they can judge whose plans are worth carrying out. Besides, a situation with too many chiefs and too few Indians leads to the decimation of the tribe. Groupies, high-school students and anyone who finds comfort in the masses may be a Conformist Archetype.

— Regain Willpower when a plan succeeds thanks to the unique support you lend it.

Conniver

The Conniver's time is much too precious to waste on things that other people happily do for him. He takes pride in getting others to do what he wants, and he may use any means necessary to accomplish this. Salesmen, con artists and the intelligent-but-lazy are all Conniver Archetypes.

— Regain Willpower whenever you get someone else to do your dirty work.

Curmudgeon

The Curmudgeon refuses to hold any delusions about outcomes or ideas, even if it earns him the title "pessimist." Nothing ever works out the way it should, and Murphy's Law is sometimes a lot more applicable than the laws of physics. And don't even get him started on people.... Curmudgeons can be anyone, from crabby old ladies to disaffected youth.

— Regain Willpower when someone does something stupid or a plan fails, just like you knew it would. You may have to predict this failure privately to the Storyteller.

Director

To the Director, nothing is worse than chaos and disorder. The Director seeks to be in charge, adopting a "my way or the highway" attitude on matters of decision-making. The Director is most concerned with bringing order out of strife, however, and need not be truly "in control" of a group to guide it. Coaches, teachers and many political figures exemplify the Director Archetype.

— Regain a point of Willpower when you influence a group in the completion of a difficult task.

Dreamer

Dreamers strive to use their ideas to rise above their surroundings or limitations. They may share their views with others, but seldom have a plan for going from what *is* to what *should be*. Thus, Dreamers' lofty goals are often met with skepticism, but it is these tests of societal boundaries that bring about change in the end. Inventors, artists and philosophers most closely embody the Dreamer Archetype.

— Regain Willpower whenever you convince someone to alter their course of action and follow your vision.

Fanatic

The Fanatic has a higher goal and his sense of duty requires him to follow it to the utmost. If someone, even the defenseless, get in the way of this objective, the Fanatic pushes them down and walks over them if he must. The end always justifies the means. Revolutionaries, crackpots and extremists fall into this mold.

— Choose a cause. Gain Willpower every time you take a major stride in support of it.

Gallant

A Gallant wants nothing more than the admiration of others. She's a showoff and performer, dramatizing a situation if she feels it wins her an audience. Sometimes, the Gallant loses track of the goal in her histrionic pursuit of it. Gallants are often actors, single children and others who base their self-esteem on the approval of others.

— Regain Willpower when you suitably impress someone (Storyteller's discretion).

Gambler

To the Gambler, life is a toss of the dice and there is no greater thrill than beating the odds. Gamblers sometimes get themselves into dangerous situations simply for the affirmation that comes from escaping it. Daredevils, extreme-sports fanatics and stock brokers are good examples of the Gambler Archetype.

— Regain Willpower when you triumph against difficult odds, especially when you've stacked them against yourself.

Pedagogue

The Pedagogue knows it all and desperately wants to inform others. Whether through a sense of purpose or a genuine desire to help others, the Pedagogue makes sure his message is heard — at length, if necessary. Pedagogue Archetypes may range from well-meaning mentors to verbose blowhards who love to hear themselves talk. Instructors, the overeducated and "veterans of their field" are all examples of Pedagogue Archetypes.

— Regain one point of Willpower whenever you see or learn of someone who benefits from your wisdom.

Penitent

Pentients have a sin, real or imagined, for which they wish to atone. The Penitent himself determines the sin. Some Penitents have an ever-increasing list of wrongs that they accumulate from day to day, all of which must be ameliorated in different ways. Penitents aren't necessarily religious, they simply feel they must scourge an evil within them. Reformed criminals and persons with low self-esteem are Penitent Archetypes.

— Gain Willpower when you perform an adequate act of reparation that either removes a lesser sin or is a step toward assuaging a greater one (Storyteller's discretion).

Perfectionist

A job worth doing is a job worth doing perfectly, and the Perfectionist accepts nothing less. She spends long hours detailing her plans and is not satisfied unless they are executed flawlessly. Perfectionists also tend to expect this sort of care from others. Prima donnas, directors and Olympic trainers are all Perfectionist Archetypes.

— Regain Willpower when you achieve unmitigated success in something important.

Rebel

The Rebel has a need to undermine authority. Whether his grievances against the system are legitimate or simply an outgrowth of some wrong done to him in the past is inconsequential. The Rebel consciously prefers to challenge an authority figure or society's dictates, even if his choice may lead him down a more difficult road. Teenagers, nonconformists and criminals may all be Rebel Archetypes.

— Regain Willpower whenever you oppose an authority figure and let him know it, or when you earn others' respect for opposing the status quo.

Rogue

The Rogue relies on no one but himself. His sense of self-sufficiency is strong, and he tends to consider the dependence of others to be weakness. Although he is not necessarily cold-hearted or cruel, he usually has the best interests of only one person in mind: himself. The Rogue may work with other hunters in order to survive, but doing so rankles him and he seeks every opportunity to go off on his own. Capitalists, slum-dwellers and smugglers all embody the Rogue Archetype.

— Regain Willpower when you profit by focusing on yourself only.

Survivor

No matter what happens, no matter the odds or opposition, the Survivor always manages to pull through. Whether alone or with a group, the Survivor's utter refusal to accept defeat often makes the difference between success and failure. Survivors are frustrated by others' acceptance of "what fate has in store," or by any unwillingness to better a situation. Outcasts, street folk and idealists may well be Survivor Archetypes.

— Regain one point of Willpower whenever you survive a threatening situation through tenacity, or when another persists in spite of adversity thanks to your counsel.

Traditionalist

The Traditionalist is wary of the risks that untested methods present. For her, there is safety in the tried and true. Traditionalists tend to be followers of the status quo; if it works for everyone else, it works for her, too. Conser-

vatives, authorities and generally anyone who benefits from the System may be a Traditionalist Archetype.

—Regain Willpower whenever your use of the proven ways discredits more radical methods.

Trickster

No matter how grim the situation becomes, the Trickster is able to dredge up a bit of humor from it. Tricksters try to lighten the spirits of everyone around them by using commentary, wit or physical humor. By putting on a gleeful mask, the Trickster hopes to play the fool for everyone, including himself. Political cartoonists, comedians and class clowns often have Trickster Archetypes.

—Regain Willpower whenever you manage to lighten a dark situation and give others hope.

Attributes

Hunters, their prey and nearly all other sentient beings in the World of Darkness have Attributes. These Traits determine your character's raw potential in several general categories. Most people have scores between 1 (poor) and 3 (above average), with 2 representing typical human potential. Rare gifted individuals may have an Attribute score of 4 (excellent) and a tiny percent of the population possesses scores of 5 (peak human capacity). These last are the people who break Olympic records, cure civilization-threatening diseases and end wars — or start them.

Physical

Physical Traits reflect the condition of your character's body. These Traits are usually highest in action-oriented characters, those who can both take and deliver corporal abuse or get the hell out of the way if the need arises.

Strength

Father St. George weighed his options quickly: The grate looked heavy, its hinges stubbornly rusted from years of neglect. He glanced down the tunnel ahead, playing his flashlight beam off the murky water. He supposed there might be a culvert at the end or a loose manhole that he could force up. But it was just as likely that the tunnel ended abruptly in a flood gate, or even worse, continued to narrow until he was crawling through the sewage like a rat — swimming in his own vomit as those things stalking him gnawed on his ass.

He put the end of the flashlight in his mouth, laced his fingers through the grillwork and yanked desperately.

Strength is your character's brute physical power. It is the determining factor in all tests of muscles alone. Arm wrestling, heavy lifting and smashing things are all good examples of tasks that require a Strength roll. The number of points your character has in Strength is added to his damage dice pool in hand-to-hand combat.

Specialties

A specialty is a particular subcategory of a Trait in which a character is particularly adept. A doctor character with several dots in Medicine may specialize in *hematology*. A character with a high Stamina may be able to *endure torture* without a whimper. A thief proficient in Security might be adept at *cracking safes*. Only characters with scores of 4 or higher in a particular Trait may choose to specialize in them. Choose a one or two-word label for your character's specialty and mark it on your character sheet next to the Trait in question. The Trait descriptions in this chapter list examples of specialties. Specialties apply to only Attributes and Abilities.

If you make a die roll involving an activity in which your character has specialized, you may re-roll any 10 in order to gain even more successes, ignoring any botches on the re-roll. Any 10 received on a re-roll is rolled again until there are no further 10s. The results of such rolls are the extraordinary successes that can be achieved through near-mastery of a particular field.

Example: Brandon enters the university library after-hours, attempting to understand the odd glyphs and wards that he found in the basement of the old planetarium. To determine success, the Storyteller has the player roll Brandon's Intelligence (3) + Research (4, specialty: runes) against a difficulty of 8. The player gets only two successes, both 10s. He re-rolls them and gets a 9 and a 10. He re-rolls the final 10 and gets an 8, for a total of five successes. Thanks to his specialty (and to careful cross-referencing), Brandon is able to discover not only the dark meaning of the symbols, but their supposed origin and history.

Specialties: Strong Back, Rock Grip, Unmovable, Calves of Steel

- • Poor: You can lift 40 pounds.
- •• Average: You can lift 100 pounds.
- ••• Good: You can lift 250 pounds.
- •••• Exceptional: You can lift 400 pounds.
- ••••• Outstanding: You can lift 600 pounds.

Dexterity

"I'm not afraid to die again!"

The dead thing's defiance was almost drowned out in the raging gale. It edged toward the bowsprit of the tiny craft, pea jacket flapping madly like the tattered sail. Michelle fought down her nausea as she staggered across the pitching, rolling deck. Her feet threatened to slide out from under her with every step and dump her onto the slick boards before the monster. The unfamiliar weight of the fire ax in her hands

made finding her balance even more difficult, but she wasn't about to alleviate herself of that *burden.*

Your character's Dexterity Attribute indicates her familiarity with the movements of her body. It comprises her speed, balance and agility in large physical actions, as well as her acumen with fine motions — those requiring hand-eye coordination or subtle grace.

Specialties: Swift, Graceful, Lightning Reflexes, Surgeon's Hands

- • Poor: After the first disaster, your dad never played catch with you again.
- •• Average: You seldom embarrass yourself at the company softball game.
- ••• Good: Learning new sports comes easily for you.
- •••• Exceptional: You could profit from your talents as a professional juggler, dancer or cat burglar.
- ••••• Outstanding: You have the fluid, natural grace of a panther.

Stamina

The volume on the expensive German speakers was as high as it could go. Despite the pounding bass and the Maxi-Kup of Kenyan AA surging through his system, Marshall was hypnotized by the rhythm of the lane divider as it passed beneath his sedan. He rubbed his eyes hard, making fireworks blossom in the red darkness. He'd been driving for over a day-and-a-half now, with only the briefest stops for gas, piss and coffee. He hated this torture, but if he tried to board a plane with what he had buried under blankets in the trunk, well, there would be questions. The sedan's high beams illuminated a sign: "San Francisco 314."

Stamina covers both your character's physical and mental fortitude. Hunters with high Stamina can withstand hellish amounts of pain, resist crippling amounts of fatigue or illness, and — if the need arises — drink copious amounts of alcohol and remain standing. With great Stamina comes a tenacity that allows your character to endure when others have long before given in. Your character's Stamina determines how many dice are rolled to soak injuries.

Specialties: Tireless, Unyielding, Tough as Hell, Unmindful of Pain

- • Poor: You hop into the car to visit friends down the street.
- •• Average: Golf carts are for sissies.
- ••• Good: You frequently pull all-nighters for work with a minimum of complaining.
- •••• Exceptional: You could run all day if you had to.
- ••••• Outstanding: You often run all day — for fun.

Social

Stalking the world's Most Dangerous Game is often treacherous, even for the most able hunters. Social Attributes come in handy for prudent ones who hope to enlist others' help, talk to "the enemy," lure unsuspecting prey into a more vulnerable position, or to deal with outsiders not in on the big secret. These Traits determine your character's capacity to win friends and influence people.

Charisma

"You're not wrong, and I don't blame you for doing your job." Marshall's voice was gentle and placating, as if he were calming a frightened puppy. His friend Angela choked back a laugh.

"The combined worth of the books in here exceeds 4.2 million dollars, you know," the librarian groused. Over the course of his conversation with Marshall, the little troll's mien had softened from truculent obstinacy to petulant wheedling. "The background forms only take a few weeks to clear...."

Ten minutes later, they were discussing their mutual hatred of paperwork. A few minutes after that, they were sharing fly-fishing tales.

That afternoon, Marshall pored over an 18th-century folio, the book he wasn't supposed *to see.*

Charisma comes into play when your character attempts to win over another or to get others to trust him. Charisma does *not* work through trickery or deceit — that's Manipulation's domain. Rather, Charisma works as a straightforward means to get others to share your character's point of view. It may take longer to win others to your side, but they won't hate you afterward as they might with Manipulation.

Specialties: Eloquent, Smooth Talker, Trustworthy, Commanding Presence, Charming

- • Poor: You don't have many friends, but who needs stupid ol' friends anyway?
- •• Average: You can be likable when you want to be.
- ••• Good: People are drawn to you despite little or no special effort on your part.
- •••• Exceptional: Your disarming presence, even in a brief encounter, is talked about for months afterward.
- ••••• Outstanding: Near-strangers would take bullets for you.

Manipulation

"You made love *to my wife!" Roland's face and voice were shattered glass. Erick prepared the climax to the opus he'd been composing all evening. He was there to coax out the beast that they said lived within Roland* Van Owen. *He needed to see for himself.*

"We didn't make love. We fucked," *Erick spat the last word, giving it the emphasis of a cinder block tossed into a duck pond, "We* used *each other."*

The rogue hunter paused only for a second to emit an animal roar at his tormentor, then he charged with the same raw ferocity that had razed the Bella Vista slums that August. The report from Erick's pistol echoed in the tiny room. Roland's head and the spent casing hit the floorboards simultaneously. The souls of a dozen charred defenseless were avenged in the fetid night air.

Manipulation is the fine art of getting others to do what your character wants, whether it's in their best interests or not. The best manipulators can make others believe that a proposed task is indeed to their advantage, that there really is no better way. Of course, some people find that fast-talking

and badgering produce quicker results. A character using Manipulation — as opposed to Charisma — doesn't want to make an ally, only to mold a patsy to her will.

A hunter who applies Manipulation frequently wins few friends. No one likes to be used; failed or botched Manipulation rolls routinely engender feelings of distrust.

Specialties: Tempting, Evocative, Silver-Tongued, Calculating

- • Poor: You've learned to tug at others' base desires, but that's all.
- •• Average: You can usually put one over on folks who already trust you.
- ••• Good: You seldom have to dirty your hands with unwanted chores.
- •••• Exceptional: People are your playthings, to be taken from their boxes and thrown away at your whim.
- ••••• Outstanding: "As your new president...."

Appearance

Michaelangelo was stoked. Before that thing took him in last week, dynamite-looking chicks wouldn't even talk to him. Now the hottest booty in the club had nabbed him — Him! — even with his chicken legs and beak of a nose. If only they could see him now, leading this babe out the back door for a little action. Being immortal was awesome! He kissed her hand, causing her to giggle and swat him playfully with her purse.

"Damn, girl," he said in mock pain, "what's in there? A bowling ball?" She just laughed.

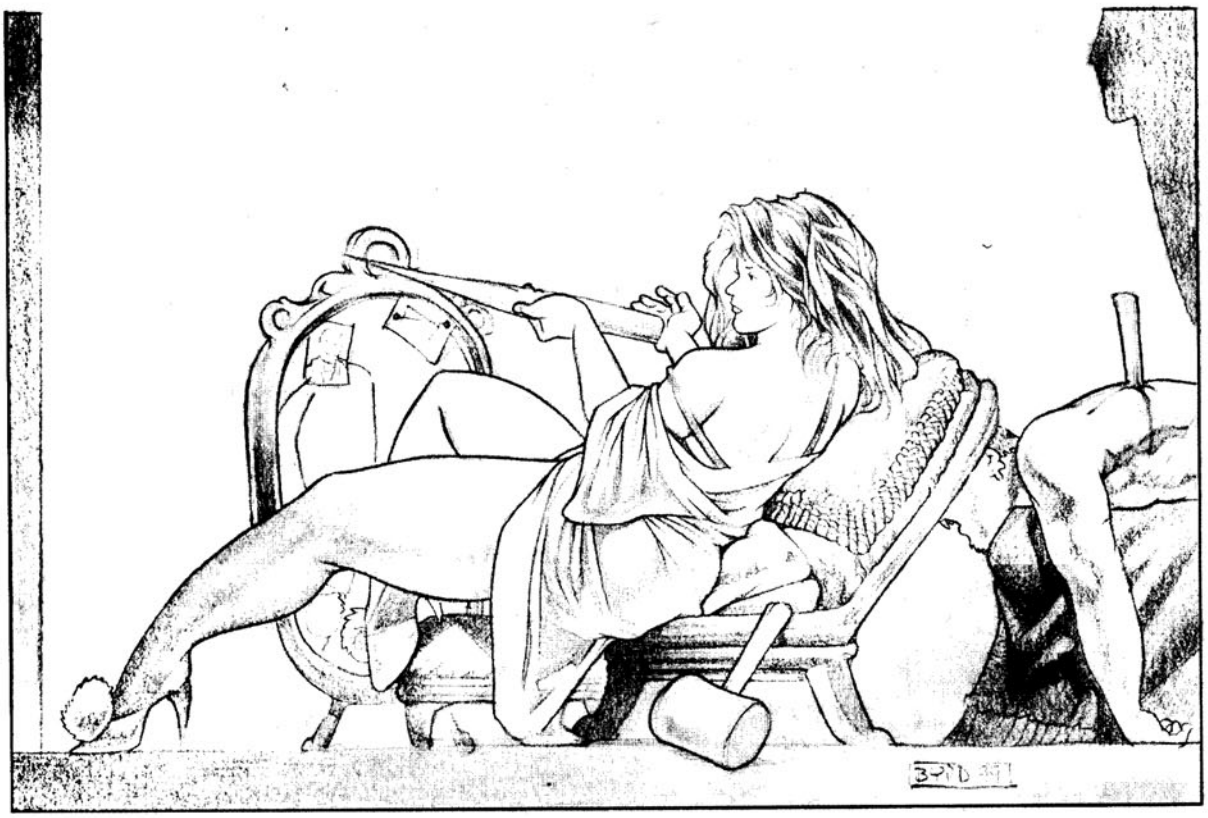
That's when the "girl" showed Michaelangelo what the weight in her purse was. And that it was loaded with hollow-point bullets.

The Appearance Attribute measures more than simply your character's looks — it represents the intangibles about her presence: the way your character holds herself in public, for example, or the air of confidence that she emanates. Almost everyone has been surprised by a seemingly unremarkable individual whose *je ne sais quoi* makes her irresistible.

Despite countless trite maxims and "ugly duckling" rehashes, people are generally disposed toward those they find attractive, even if they think they should know better. The power of the first impression is immense; a character with low Appearance may struggle to create a good one. In fact, in social situations where first impressions are paramount, your character's Social dice pool may be limited to her Appearance score, even if the Attribute otherwise rolled is Charisma or Manipulation.

Specialties: Seductive, Fresh-Faced, Aristocratic, Alluring

- • Poor: You are the target of derision by people who should have outgrown the habit.
- •• Average: You buy your own drinks at bars.
- ••• Good: You find it easier to make friends of the opposite sex.



●●●● Exceptional: Your beauty attracts a lot of attention — which may not always be a good thing.

●●●●● Outstanding: You cause accidents at traffic lights.

Mental

Mental Attributes describe the efficacy of the gray, spongy stuff between your character's ears. Not simply about your character's ability to learn and think critically, these Traits measure her capacity to interpret her surroundings and react to them quickly.

Perception

"I guess he's not flying out with us tonight, after all — not unless he wants to unplug himself from those IVs."

"Uh-uh. That chicken-shit's going to San Francisco. Play the message again."

"Huh?"

Before Eph could react, Spaulding reached forward and pressed the "rewind" button. Victor's enfeebled voice croaked about dizziness and hospital beds.

"Now listen — right before he hangs up — listen to the background noise." There was a short trough of static between the message's final "Good luck" and the terminal click. Eph held her breath. Just before the click of the receiver, sunk deep beneath the waves of distortion, she heard it: the clack of billiard balls.

This Attribute represents your character's capacity to cull important details from her surroundings, sometimes consciously, often intuitively. A hunter with high Perception is sensitive to specific environmental stimuli, and may notice the razor concealed up the "sweet" little girl's sleeve long before his allies do.

Specialties: Insightful, High-Strung, Discerning, Detail-Oriented

- Poor: Something needs to bite you on the ass before you notice it.
- ●● Average: You can pick up on some small details.
- ●●● Good: You have a talent for sifting out the important minutiae of a situation.
- ●●●● Exceptional: You're intimately aware of your surroundings at all times.
- ●●●●● Outstanding: You never needed to use a microscope in Bio class.

Intelligence

"1010101010."

"More than just a meaningless bunch of 10s on the back of a business card, right Victor?"

As Houston wracked his brain, Pike rifled through the wallet a fourth time. "You said the stop code would be in here! You said he—"

"He told me it was there. Victor wouldn't remember his wife's name if it was tattooed on his arm!" Houston waved the card at Pike, "This has to be it."

"It can't be," Pike's voice was tense as he watched the bomb's display tick below "30." "It's gotta be a three-digit code, moron! I told you that twice!"

Houston closed his eyes for a moment, calculating. Then, he reached over Victor's unconscious form to the bomb's keypad and hit "3," then "4," then "1." The countdown stopped. He turned to Pike. "Binary, 'moron.'"

The Intelligence Attribute measures several aspects of what makes a person appear smart in others' eyes: reasoning ability, memory, creative and critical thinking, and problem solving. Intelligence is no substitute for experience, though. The whiz kid with almost no common sense is a cliché. Likewise, there are kids who can't find Europe on a blank map, but who can survive in the most dangerous neighborhoods in town.

Specialties: Creative, Puzzle Fiend, Book-Smart, Elephant-like Memory

- Poor: Ain't got no use fer learnin' no-how (IQ 80).
- ●● Average: You do the newspaper crossword puzzle and word jumble every day (IQ 100).
- ●●● Good: Every team wants you on their side for *Trivial Pursuit* (IQ 120).
- ●●●● Exceptional: You can rise to the challenge of reading *Ulysses* (IQ 140).
- ●●●●● Outstanding: You consider James Joyce tolerable bathroom reading (IQ 160).

Wits

Michael knew that if he kept running blindly through the maze, they'd catch him eventually. He could hear them over the dull thud of the drum and bass music from upstairs. The basement of the club was the color of a blood blister, lit only by infrequent, dangling bulbs. If his pursuers happened to come down this corridor, there would be no witnesses.

He glanced into a deep alcove as he passed by. Two figures writhed together in the shadows, their moist whispers barely audible. As the clank of heavy chains grew louder behind him, Michael dropped to his knees just inside the alcove's entrance, facing the couple. Gotta hide, *his brain screamed,* Gotta blend in. *And with that, Michael unzipped his pants and began to blend in.*

Intelligence refers to how deeply your character's consciousness runs; Wits measures how quickly it flows. A character with high Wits can understand and adapt quickly to changes, whereas one with low Wits might struggle to absorb everything. Characters with high Wits are also able to resist panic, even in dire situations.

Specialties: Unsurprisable, Sharp-Tongued, Level-Headed, Adaptable

- Poor: You have trouble getting knock-knock jokes.
- ●● Average: You make pointedly snide comments while watching bad movies.
- ●●● Good: You know the perfect put-down for every situation.
- ●●●● Exceptional: No one ever gets the jump on you.

●●●●● Outstanding: Your body has trouble keeping up with your mind.

Abilities

Whereas Attributes are the natural potentials your character was born with, Abilities measure how he puts those potentials to use. Your character may have lightning-fast reflexes, but can he transfer that nimbleness to his car when it fishtails on an icy road? Even the smoothest charmer can look like a putz at a black-tie affair if he doesn't know the correct formalities. Attributes can improve through years of experience, training or study, while Abilities are much more flexible. When your character attempts to do anything, you usually roll a dice pool combining an Attribute and an appropriate Ability.

There are 36 Abilities separated evenly into three separate categories: Talents, Skills and Knowledges. Some Abilities (Expression, Crafts, Performance, Academics, Science) require you to choose a specialty (p. 101), even if your character's rating is not 4 or higher. For example, a character with Performance may have a grounding in singing, dancing and acting from her off-Broadway experience — but her true talent (her specialty) lies in dramatic soliloquies

Paint a picture of your character's identity and past when choosing Abilities. The things a person knows or is able to do say a lot about her. Even a single dot in an Ability can reveal a fascinating aspect of her identity — especially when the Ability seems to clash with the character's concept. A company CEO with points in Streetwise? Maybe he rose to prominence from his beginnings in the inner city and never lost touch with the old neighborhood. Perhaps he's in the thrall of a brutal coke addiction and doesn't trust anyone else to arrange his fix. As long as you remain in the realm of plausibility, use your allotted points as a palette to create a memorable portrait.

Talents

Talents are capabilities for which your character simply has a knack, regardless of training or instruction. The only way to improve these Traits is through direct experience, although pointers are occasionally useful. If you attempt an action involving a Talent that your character doesn't possess, you suffer no additional penalties (increased difficulty, for example); everyone has some degree of aptitude in these most instinctive of Traits.

Alertness

So when I walk into the house and find Ephie giving me a Bronx cheer from the end of a piano wire, I know they're enjoying this. I suppress my feelings for my dead friend in hopes of venting them on her killers. Her face still has color, so it seems I've just missed the party. By the look of the place, she put up a good fight.

I smell the rotting bastard long before I see him. I feel him when I spin and sink my foot into his bloated gut. He knew his stuff when he was still alive, but that grave smell is a dead giveaway.

Then I remember: Poor Eph had a cold.

Unlike the Perception Attribute, which represents your character's knack for recognizing specific clues, the Alertness Talent measures how sensitive he is to his physical surroundings. A character with high Alertness can take in every detail of a scene in an instant and use Perception to sift out the important ones.

Alertness is different from Awareness in that the former makes your character sensitive to his physical surroundings. The latter makes him sensitive to his *supernatural* surroundings.

- ● Novice: "I think we're in trouble here."
- ●● Practiced: "These guys are pretty tough for a bunch of winos. We're in trouble."
- ●●● Competent: "Since when do bums have fur? We're in big trouble."
- ●●●● Expert: "These 'street people' have all got submachine guns under their coats. We're in *really* big trouble."
- ●●●●● Master: "I'm more worried about the pack of slavering wolves about to come up through the grate behind us. We're *screwed*."

Possessed by: Hunters, Detectives, The Paranoid, Security Personnel, Journalists

Specialties: A Specific Sense (Hearing, Smell, Taste, Sight, Touch), Concealed Items, Wilderness, Urban Areas

Athletics

Two figures leapt across the gulf between the buildings, but only one landed on the other side.

"Parker," came a harsh whisper from below. "Parker, give me a hand! Hurry!" The larger one, fat after quiet years behind a desk, dangled from the lip of a rain gutter.

The small one turned and looked down into the abyss, then across at the approaching hounds. They moved gracelessly. But far from being amusing, their unnaturalness seemed only frightening to him. Their jerky movements wholly belied a bizarre agility, speed and cunning. They tore at the gravel of the far rooftop as they loped toward him. He gave one last look at his partner's whitening fingers and began to fumble a fistful of rounds into his revolver.

Athletics covers how well your character can run, jump, swim, hurl, pursue and flee. Naturally, it includes adeptness at sports, but not basic motor skills covered by Attributes alone (such as power lifting or sleight of hand). Additionally, Athletics doesn't intrude upon the realms of other Abilities such as Brawl or Dodge.

- ● Novice: Sunday-afternoon tennis lessons as a kid.
- ●● Practiced: High-school athlete.
- ●●● Competent: College-football hero.
- ●●●● Expert: Olympic hopeful.
- ●●●●● Master: The salary your skills could demand would outstrip the GNP of several developing nations.

Possessed by: Athletes, Outdoors Enthusiasts, Fitness Nuts, Kids

Specialties: Swimming, Climbing, Acrobatics, Dancing, Swinging

Awareness

There was only one thing in the missing hunter's apartment that frightened Erick, and he couldn't say why. It was the small, bug-eyed creature that sat atop Sarin's monitor and stared unblinkingly at the far wall. It was about the size of his clenched fist and made of molded plastic, like something Sarin might have won at a carny. Nonetheless, it filled Erick with vague unease, as if the sparrow-egg eyes flitted after him when he turned away. Then Michelle called them all into the kitchen, and he forgot the little figure. It wasn't until it turned up in Erick's bag that he remembered it.

Your character is able to see the world as she never could before, and not just as a result of being imbued — other hunters can see *the truth*, too. No, your character is able to notice unusual phenomena in her vicinity and perhaps even detect the presence of the supernatural — things that even her peers miss. A few successes might instill the sense of another presence in a room. A large number might allow your character to pinpoint the specific nature of a monster, provided she's encountered it before. This Talent extends to both animate and inanimate objects, and to phenomena that may be invisible to the unenlightened.

Although you must still expend Conviction for your character to detect and recognize the supernatural (see p. 132), she doesn't necessarily need to use an edge to identify the exact nature of a creature — say a shapechanger or a bloodsucker. Rather, sufficient successes in an Awareness roll identify the creature at the Storyteller's discretion. Awareness may also allow your character to simply sense that her environment is supernaturally askew or tainted, without benefit of any concrete evidence.

Awareness is different from Alertness in that the former makes your character sensitive to his mystical surroundings. The latter makes him sensitive to his *physical* surroundings. Awareness and Intuition also differ in that Awareness imparts an inherent sense for the supernatural, whereas Intuition offers a simple sense for correct choices and possibilities, usually mundane rather than mystical.

- Novice: You instinctively mistrust some people, but you're not sure why.
- •• Practiced: You've seen some things that no rational explanation could account for.
- ••• Competent: You see the ethereal threads that en mesh the waking world.
- •••• Expert: You suspect that there are realms beyond your own, perhaps the homelands of the creatures you hunt.

••••• Master: You see so much of the unexplainable, you're worried that it might drive you mad. Maybe it already has.

Possessed by: Psychics, Gypsies, American Indians, Asylum Inmates

Specialties: Talismans, the Undead, Animals, Portents, Supernatural Powers, Auras

Brawl

Fear tore at Michelle's brain as the revenant pinned her to the ground with its cold body. Fear turned to panic when the creature's hands wrapped around her throat and squeezed. Purple lightning seemed to flash before her eyes. The creature's head moved toward hers, its jaws opened wide as if to force some foul affection on her. Through the haze, an old college memory resurfaced. She brought her right knee up hard into the creature's pelvis. At the same time, she grabbed the monster's head with both hands, her thumbs over its eyes, and drove her manicured nails deep into the sockets. She closed her eyes to the vision, but her mind burned with a single perverse image: poached eggs.

Conventional weapons never seem to be around when they're needed, or they fail at the most inopportune times. Some hunters believe that the most reliable way to inflict harm is the oldest way: tooth and nail. Points in Brawl can stem from formal training or simply painful experience, but the best fighters are the least inhibited when causing agony.

- • Novice: You took a self-defense course at the YMCA.
- •• Practiced: You played rugby in college.
- ••• Competent: You're either a black belt with a little fighting experience or a seasoned street fighter.
- •••• Expert: People pick fights with you only once.
- ••••• Master: You pick up pointers from *Enter the Dragon*.

Possessed by: Police, Thugs, Slum-Dwellers, the Physically Abused, Military Personnel

Specialties: A Specific Martial Arts Form, Dirty Fighting, Wrestling, Throws

Dodge

A dozen cars passed Angela every evening during her sunset jog, but this one sounded different. There was pure malice in the growl of the engine, and it rose with each of her footfalls.

Don't do this to yourself again, girl. *She strained to concentrate on the lonely road ahead.* Kids in a Camaro. Just kids. Don't give them the satisfaction of seeing fear.

But when the engine's roar enveloped Angela, panic beat down her pride and sent her diving into the drainage ditch. The car's tires pelted her with gravel as they bit into the soft shoulder where she had been a moment earlier. The driver tried to cut the wheel, but the rear tires had already left the asphalt, and the Viper went into a roll. Like a plow, it carved a path into the roadside field and kicked up clots of dirt.

Dodge is your character's capacity to get the hell out of the way. All manner of objects aimed at her can be dodged, from bullets to fists to subway trains. This Talent also measures your character's ability to utilize adequate cover in a hurry.

- • Novice: Duck and cover!
- •• Practiced: You were always the last one out in dodge ball.
- ••• Competent: You've weathered food fights without a speck.
- •••• Expert: You seem to instinctively know where a blow is aimed.
- ••••• Master: You are virtually untouchable.

Possessed by: Martial Artists, Boxers, Criminals, Action-Movie Heroes

Specialties: Firefights, Cover, Fistfights, Sidestepping

Empathy

The self-dubbed "Lord of the Manor" looked about wildly, waving the supposed bomb back and forth, and yelled, "I'll set this thing off, I promise you!"

Marshall scrutinized the creature's face carefully. With fangs bared and eyes blazing, the Lord of the Manor was a study in unmitigated hatred. And something else.

Without shifting his gaze, Marshall opened his shotgun and dropped a phosphorous round into the chamber. "It's a bluff," he announced to his companions poised behind their triggers.

Then all hell broke loose.

Your character has a gift for sharing other people's emotions — and sometimes the motives they try to hide. This Talent can be a great asset during attempts to sense others' lies. No one is a *lie detector*, though. Depth of communication with a person and information your character has about a subject can augment her ability to scrutinize. Or they can skew your character's judgment horribly.

- • Novice: You watch a lot of talk shows.
- •• Practiced: People come to you for support.
- ••• Competent: Your insight into others' feelings is uncanny.
- •••• Expert: People's faces tell you what they really want.
- ••••• Master: You read people like most folks read grocery-store labels.

Possessed by: Actors, Psychologists, Investigators, Bodyguards, Parents, Social Workers, Seducers

Specialties: Motives, Emotions, Personalities, Confidence

Expression

Dear Mr. Akelbaum,

Your latest message regarding the Chapel of the Five Wounds came as a surprise, especially considering all the e-mails that led up to it, plus the odd photos you sent me. I'm glad to hear that the eerie noises and lights that you blamed earlier on unnatural beings have a more logical explanation. I found your latest e-mail so intriguing, in fact, that I eagerly accept your invitation to view the neighboring chapel and hear your clarification firsthand. I have chosen the latest train, as you requested, and will be arriving at the station at 10:30 PM this Thursday. You needn't worry; I haven't

shown the photos to anyone and will be bringing them as you asked. See you soon!

Yours Truly,
Prof. Philip Levy Crafft
Dept. of Metaphysics, Gorneau University
plcrafft@whisperer.drknes.gu.edu

Your character's opinions capture peoples' interests, regardless of whether such opinions are misinformed, biased or even meaningless. He's able convey his points clearly, or shroud them in clever subtlety — whatever works best for his purposes. Expression allows your character to reach people through any medium: visual, auditory or otherwise. Characters with high Expression are often skilled storytellers or gifted writers.

- • Novice: You were the best Joseph the church Christmas pageant ever had.
- •• Practiced: Your conversational skills are enviable.
- ••• Competent: You could write for a living.
- •••• Expert: Your words might be discussed and lauded by millions.
- ••••• Master: You have a gift that could guide the thinking of a generation, if applied properly.

Possessed by: Actors, Politicians, Writers, Teachers, Revolutionaries, Editorialists

Specialties: Acting, Poetry, Speeches, Letters, Fiction, Debates

Intimidation

"The local anesthetic's still in effect, so you won't feel this. But just imagine how it will hurt. Think how the agony will creep up on you once the drug wears off." Peleus had learned a thing or two about psychological pain in that Cambodian death camp. He'd never had a chance to pass on his knowledge until now.

He snapped the last unbroken finger on the Renfield's left hand. The punk didn't flinch, of course, but Peleus knew he was scared. His eyes were plates and the gag in his mouth was soaked with snot. He probably would've talked three fingers ago, but Peleus wanted to be sure. "Now if you don't tell me where the 'Lizard King' is hiding, I'll move on to your right hand — and I'm all out of pain killer."

Your character has the ability to control others through fear. The power may stem from something as intangible as force of personality or from something as real as white-hot steel and manacles. Your character knows the best approach for each situation and may have no qualms about using it.

- • Novice: Obnoxious jock
- •• Practiced: Effective bouncer
- ••• Competent: All the men call you "Sir."
- •••• Expert: You can discourage muggers with a frown.
- ••••• Master: You can cow gangsters with a laugh.

Possessed by: Law Enforcement, Military Personnel, Gangsters, Executives, Security

Specialties: Veiled Threats, Air of Authority, Torture, Fear Inspiration

Intuition

"That's where they live," Houston said, pointing across the empty square to the decaying church: The Chapel of the Five Wounds. "Keep your head down!"

Gorman ducked back behind the roof's rotting balustrade. Houston continued.

"They spotted a junkie outside one night. They took him inside and... I wasn't crazy enough to go lookin' for the body. Gangbangers from the Reapers visit sometimes. No one else. Always after dark, of course. That's where the supply of Hum is coming from, I'd bet my soul. There's at least four of them. Place's a regular hornets' nest."

Houston's attention was drawn to a flickering streetlight. Two members of the Wolfpack, initiates by the color of their bandannas, stood under it drinking malt liquor. They threw down their bottles and began to stagger toward the loathsome structure.

"Here come a couple of kids with rocks now."

Unbelievers call it "unconscious logic." True believers call it a "sixth sense." Although they can never explain why, some people always seem to be great guessers, whether on exams, with significant others or in the stock market. Your character is one of those people. He's escaped more than one predicament by relying on nothing more than gut feeling. Storytellers may use these "gut feelings" to help players further a story.

Whereas Awareness imparts an inherent sense for the supernatural, Intuition offers a simple sense for correct choices and possibilities, usually mundane rather than mystical.

- • Novice: Multiple-choice exams are a breeze.
- •• Practiced: You've come to trust that little voice in your head that says, "Buy," "Sell!"
- ••• Competent: You're often prepared for unpleasant situations thanks to your "bad feelings."
- •••• Expert: Your knack for knowing without knowledge is uncanny.
- ••••• Master: You would've been condemned to death in old Salem.

Possessed by: Stock Brokers, Gamblers, Fortune Tellers, Mothers, Entrepreneurs, Investigators, Bodyguards

Specialties: Insight, Gambling, Bad Feelings, Inspirational Flashes, Hidden Motives

Leadership

Father St. George climbed into the van. "Guy gave me the signal. They've left the chapel. Here's the plan: Victor, you're point-man. Go down into the catacombs, lay the charges by the struts. Houston and Pike, take some artillery. You're his defensive line. If things get ugly, give me a beep and set the detonator.

"Spaulding, you and your little friend there are my running backs. We're looking for artifacts. We're looking for books. We're looking for chemistry sets, drugs and money. Gorman, you and Guy play safety. A leaf blows the wrong way, you get gas — anything —give me a beep. Anyone gets scared, just think of what the water supply'd taste like spiked with all that Hum."

Your character has the ability to motivate people through force of personality. You may lead by example, fear, excellent planning skills or simply through sheer confidence. Regardless of how your character does it, he seldom needs to deceive people into following him. This Talent is often paired with Charisma rather than Manipulation.

- • Novice: Class vice president
- •• Practiced: Scout leader
- ••• Competent: CEO
- •••• Expert: State senator
- ••••• Master: You could be the next leader of the free world.

Possessed by: Politicians, Royalty, Executives, Military Officers, Police, Popular Kids

Specialties: Commands, Planning, Oratory, Friendliness, Experience

Streetwise

To the casual observers on the promenade — the lovers, joggers and insomniacs — it looked like a concerned son offering to shoulder the weight of his father's backpack. To frequenters, it looked like a drug deal. Both assumptions were simultaneously correct and far from the mark.

"Christ, this weighs a ton!" Marshall faltered under the unexpected weight.

"Explosive tips weigh a helluva lot more'n leadbellies, and them .45s don't exactly squirt water." The fat man heaved one last time. "If I'd had another coupla days, I could'a got ya them Cassuls, but.... Hell, it ain't my business, Marsh, but where ya going in such a hurry, anyway?"

"San Francisco."

"Huh. Be sure to wear some flowers in yer hair."

"I will. Thanks." Marshall saluted, thumb across palm, then dashed back to his idling car.

The streets prove bountiful to those who speak the vernacular or carry the coin of the realm. Your character is able to blend in with the local scene, locate contraband, pick up gossip and stay out of trouble — most of the time. Customs change from city to city; she may be at a disadvantage outside her home town.

- • Novice: You're not an *instant* target for muggers and panhandlers.
- •• Practiced: You've got a rep.
- ••• Competent: You are tolerated and accepted — if not loved — by the gangs.
- •••• Expert: You find it easy to tap the pulse of the city.
- ••••• Master: You *are* the pulse of the city.

Possessed by: Gangbangers, Homeless People, Cops, Reporters, Criminals

Specialties: A Specific Metropolis, Fencing, Smuggling, Communication, Rumors, Gangs

Subterfuge

"You're tellin' me that at 90 miles an hour you had no idea how fast you were going?"

Marshall didn't question the cop's skepticism. After two sleepless nights of hard driving, he looked like crap. Crap with a lot of hot metal in his car.

"It was a life-or-death situation." And with that opening line, Marshall launched into a tale that had saved him from so many tickets in the past. It began with an errant wasp, an open window and a lifelong allergy. It ended with the "evidence": a hapless creature killed months ago and a borrowed insulin needle. And, of course, the closing line that always got a laugh: "I named him 'Crash.'"

The cop didn't laugh. "Lemme see that wasp." She ran a finger along its wings. "Better re-name him 'Dusty.'" Marshall blanched. "Step out of the car, please."

This Talent represents your character's capacity to lie, get away with it and sense when others lie. Your character is able to conceal his own motives, read other people's, then play upon them to his own ends. Not only is he skilled at telling others what they want to hear, he has few reservations about doing so. Characters talented in Subterfuge are masters of intrigue and seduction; they're often slipperier than the lies they tell.

- • Novice: You get away with lies people would have believed anyway.
- •• Practiced: You juggled multiple girlfriends or boy friends (or both) at college.
- ••• Competent: You could make a living from lying.
- •••• Expert: Polygraph machines whimper in your presence.
- ••••• Master: "We find the defendant, Jeffrey Dahmer, not guilty."

Possessed by: Lawyers, Politicians, Con Men, Televangelists, Hustlers, Teenagers

Specialties: Seduction, Feigned Innocence, Alibis, Fast-Talking

Skills

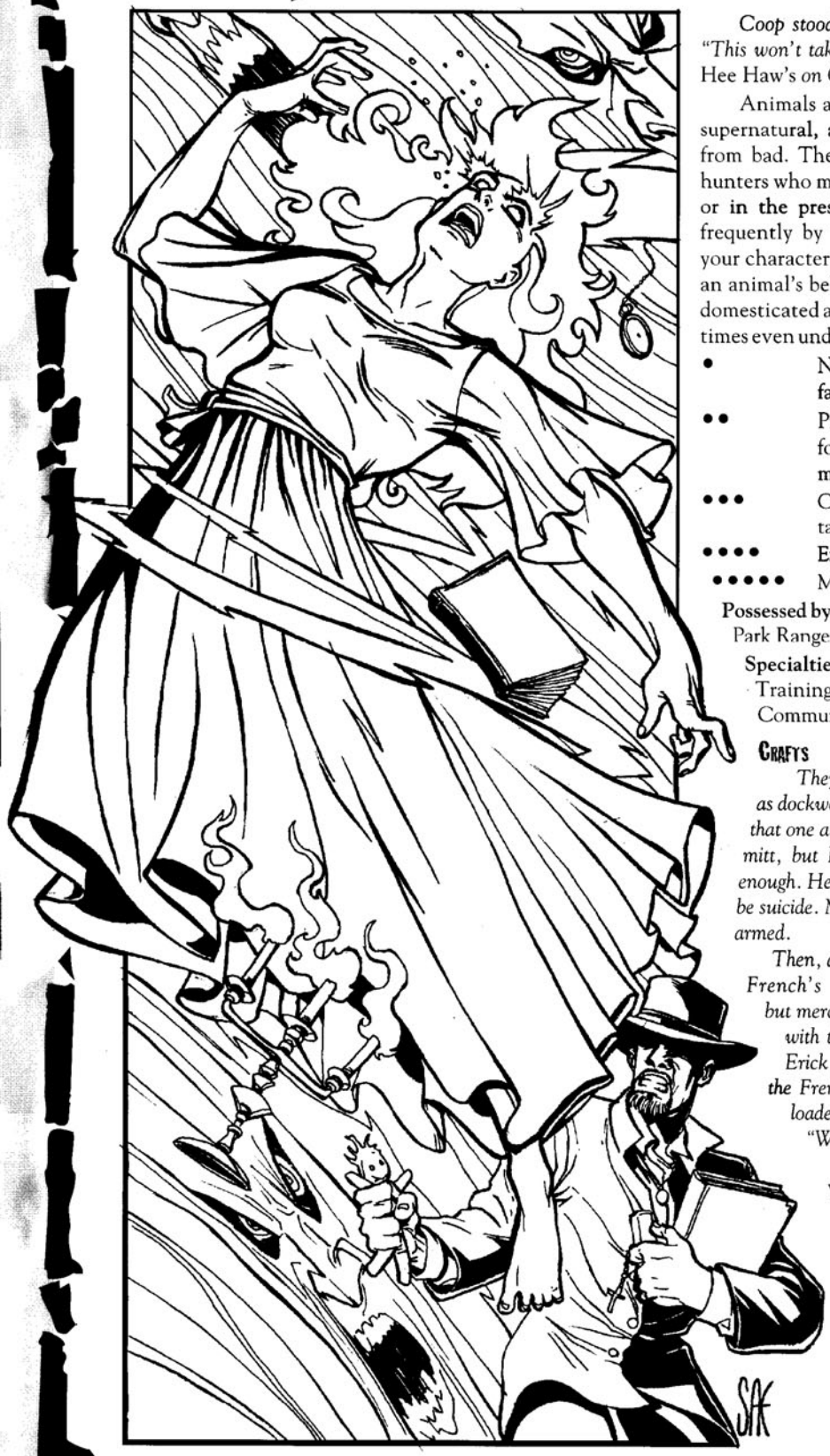
Skills are equal parts training and instinct. They are developed through experience, practice and instruction. A person with knowledge of proper procedure is at an advantage over one without such training. Rolls involving Skills that your character doesn't have are at +1 difficulty.

Animal Ken

The sun had set. It was almost time for Hee Haw, *and the man from Albuquerque had well overstayed his visit. Coop was about to pour him one more bourbon and let him know it was for the road, when the hounds started up.*

"Sounds like they smell something in the corn," said the city boy, trying to be of some use. "Raccoons, maybe?"

"Naw." Coop gave a listen to the baying and yammering. "Naw, 'taint 'coons." He poured himself a stiff one and tossed it back. "You wanna reach in that gun cabinet an' fetch me that box-a shells? No, the other box — marked 'Special.' There she is."



Coop stood up and tried to shake out the arthritis. "This won't take but a minute. You better stay in here. Hee Haw's on Channel 8, if you're innerested."

Animals aren't keen on anyone touched by the supernatural, and they can't always tell good guys from bad. They may be uneasy in the presence of hunters who make constant contact with the enemy, or in the presence of hunters who are contacted frequently by the Messengers. Animal Ken allows your character to empathize with, if not understand, an animal's behavior. She can use this Skill to train domesticated animals, calm unsettled ones and sometimes even understand what they try to communicate.

- • Novice: "What's that Lassie? Did Jimmy fall down the well *again*?"
- •• Practiced: You know which animals are fooled by playing dead and which don't mind cold dinners.
- ••• Competent: You could train a police attack dog.
- •••• Expert: You could train a lion.
- ••••• Master: You were raised by apes.

Possessed by: Farmers, Animal Trainers, Pet Owners, Park Rangers, Lonely Old Ladies Who Own Cats

Specialties: Specific Kind of Animal, Attack Training, Guard Training, Retrieval Training, Communication, Calming

Crafts

They were pinned. The goliaths masquerading as dockworkers had them against a crate. The Luger that one attacker held looked like a toy in his hammy mitt, but Erick supposed that its bullets were real enough. He knew that moving for his own piece would be suicide. Meanwhile, French seemed completely unarmed.

Then, as if by force of will, twin .38s appeared in French's hands. The exchange was deafening but mercifully brief; French targeted the monster with the gun first. In the silence that followed, Erick saw the guns whisk back into the sleeves of the French's trench coat, propelled along spring-loaded forearm braces. Erick was astonished. "Where'd you get those things?"

French was nonchalant. "Made 'em. You ever see Taxi Driver*?"*

Crafts allows your character to make and repair things with his hands (although it doesn't cover electronic devices; that's the purview of Technology, p. 114). Your character can fix cars, build a house, knit clothing, even design mechanical devices. He may also be skilled at creating works

of art, like pottery or sculpture. You must always choose a field of Crafts in which your character specializes, although he is handy enough to have general capability in several areas.

- • Novice: You sewed your own wallet at summer camp.
- •• Practiced: You're a handyman around the house.
- ••• Competent: You seldom need to call the repairman.
- •••• Expert: Your designs for clothing or art are emulated around the country.
- ••••• Master: You've swamped the patent office with your ideas.

Possessed by: Artisans, Repairmen, Inventors, Farmers, Designers

Specialties: Auto Mechanics, Appraisal, Paintings, Gadgets, Traps

Demolitions

It was the end of the second rubber, which meant it was time for Mrs. Conklin to begin talking about her daughter, the class treasurer and prom princess. Mrs. Mackinaw sighed and dealt the cards into four even piles.

"Marcy is so serious about her classwork right now that I hardly see her! Why, just the other day she had me pick up model rocket engines and fuses for your husband's Physics class, Joyce."

Mrs. Miller barked a laugh and stabbed out her cigarette. "Must be a helluva project. They're learnin' about wave motion right now."

"Huh." Mrs. Conklin took a sip of her tea. "Huh." She looked at her cards. "Well, one no-trump to you, Anne."

Demolitions is the fine art of making things go boom. With this Skill, your character knows how to make, identify, disarm and use a variety of explosive devices. She also knows where to place explosives inside a large structure for maximum effect, and how to direct explosive power through techniques like tamping. Of course, the most effective bombs require materials that are both expensive and illegal. Demolitions gives your character the know-how to combine components, not the ability to acquire them.

- • Novice: You mix a mean Molotov cocktail.
- •• Practiced: Pipe bombs
- ••• Competent: Car bombs
- •••• Expert: High-yield explosives
- ••••• Master: You deal strictly in megatons.

Possessed by: Bomb Squads, Radicals, Construction Workers, Soldiers

Specialties: Timers, Triggers, Disarming, Everyday Chemicals, Placement, Electronics

Drive

Peleus leaned on the wheel. He'd be coming up on Angela any minute now. She jogged along the same farm road at the same time every day. Shame to flatten that gorgeous ass on the blacktop. But she'd seen him and Van Owen flushing prey in the ghetto. She'd objected to the flames — vehemently. She hadn't squealed yet, but she would — if he didn't make her squeal first.

He topped a rise, saw her and gave it gas. The great thing about the Viper was that he wouldn't even have to leave second gear. Maybe he'd sideswipe her instead. Knock her into the fields, finish the job with his bare hands. Of course, he'd attend to that gorgeous ass first. The tach climbed to six, then seven. The thick bitch wasn't even turning around. Piece of cake, just shimmy the wheel aaand....

Your character knows how to drive a car. With high levels in this Skill, he can pull off tricky maneuvers at dangerously high speeds. This Skill also imparts an awareness of cars' limits and how to push them. This understanding can be very useful when a BMW full of gun-toting bloodsuckers decides to chase your character's utility van. Additional dots also offer expertise in a broad range of vehicles —motorcycles or 18-wheelers, for example.

If your character doesn't have this Skill, he can still drive, but only an automatic. Any Drive rolls made are based on the appropriate Attribute only, at +1 difficulty. Of course, you may not want your character to know how to drive at all.

- • Novice: You can drive any type of car, automatic or stick shift.
- •• Practiced: You fight rush-hour traffic on a daily basis.
- ••• Competent: Taxi driver or professional trucker.
- •••• Expert: Stock-car racer.
- ••••• Master: You're as comfortable driving a car on two wheels as you are on four.

Possessed by: Race-Car Drivers, Truckers, Punk Kids, Commuters, Chauffeurs

Specialties: Off-Road, Motorcycles, Reverse, Heavy Traffic, Turns, Tailing, Getaways, Ramming

Etiquette

The "Baron" — Marshall posing as a gentleman-fop — was a smash. The way he leaped to the first zesty mazourka *elicited gasps, along with an invitation to the host's table. His comment on the* pinot noir *— "I tend to favor wines made from* temperamental grapes" — met with unanimous assent from his tablemates.

French — posing as "the Baron's" security — watched from afar. He couldn't help but notice that only Marshall touched his drink. French hated this work; too much chance of being caught — and then the simple proximity to things he should rightfully kill where they sat! Yet a simple word from these bloodsuckers could get Marshall an audience with the pope — or perhaps the group's blasphemous leader. Their joint plan had gone well so far, but was "the Baron" charming enough to gain a private audience with the Lord of the Manor? That was the real test.

Your character is knowledgeable in the formal behaviors of society. This Skill typically extends only to

the environment with which he is most familiar, but the truly polished are learned in the protocols of several cultures. High scores in this field can make your character respected and remembered in situations where formality is paramount.

- • Novice: You took ballroom dancing classes at the community center.
- •• Practiced: You've been to a few charitable dinners.
- ••• Competent: Perhaps you served a stint as a *sommelier* or a *maitre d'*.
- •••• Expert: You are a true diplomat, comfortable in any formal setting.
- ••••• Master: You are either royalty or a person who caters to royalty.

Possessed by: High Society, Diplomats, World Travelers, Politicians, Snobs

Specialties: Business, European Customs, Asian Customs, Seduction, Networking, Sycophancy

Firearms

"You think that's *creepy? Watch* this."

Yasmine couldn't look away. For the last few minutes, she had watched through Erick's infrared scope as two figures left the nightclub: one a normal miasma of reds and oranges, the other a curious greenish-yellow silhouette. Even stranger was the rush of ochre that flooded the latter when the two began to kiss in the shadow of an alley.

There was the vip *of a suppressed shot and the silhouette's head seemed to erupt, leaving a blossom of amber on the alley wall. Yasmine tore herself from the scope and turned to Erick, who looked up from his rifle.*

"You said it was a tranq dart!" she hissed angrily. Erick appeared unmoved.

"I lied. Don't worry — he won't stay down."

Torches and pitchforks are weapons of the past. A modern-day hunter who uses traditional weapons against the supernatural — and lives — quickly learns to adopt more modern means of subduing prey. This Skill covers a broad range of weapons from derringers to machine guns, and includes knowledge of how to clean, repair, unjam (Wits + Firearms), and recognize them — plus, how to kill others with them. Firearms does not, however, include heavy artillery like mortar rockets or antitank guns.

- • Novice: You subscribe to *Arms and Armaments*.
- •• Practiced: Many a clay pigeon has met its end thanks to your skillful trigger finger.
- ••• Competent: An avid hunter of wildlife or otherwise.
- •••• Expert: Your friends call you "Crack-shot."
- ••••• Master: You've fired more bullets than any single brigade ever will.

Possessed by: Law Enforcement, Survivalists, Military Personnel, Gun Nuts

Specialties: Solid-Slug Guns, Scatter-guns, Sprays, Sniping, Called Shots

Melee

Gorman dropped his weapon and clutched at his eye, which throbbed scarlet. The creature laughed — a cold, rasping sound — then pushed past him and sprinted up the stairs. Guy and the others arrived soon after.

"Gorman! God, man! What did that bitch do to you?" Guy reached forward to remove Gorman's hand from his face. Gorman flinched away.

"Nothing! I'm fine.... She's headed for the bell tower."

"Thanks, Jim." Guy started for the stairs, then turned and pointed at Gorman's feet, "Since when did you learn to use 'chucks?"

Gorman's only response was to feel for his weapon lying inert on the floor. Once the others' footsteps faded up the stairs, he staggered off, his pride now stinging worse than his eye. He searched for a curtain with which to wipe his own blood from the nunchaku.

Sometimes it's best to fight monsters without waking up the entire neighborhood. That's when hand-to-hand weapons come into play. Melee is the Skill to use all manner of such arms, from the classic wooden stake to martial-arts implements to improvised weapons such as broken bottles and folding chairs.

- • Novice: You can show off with a sword and not cut yourself.
- •• Practiced: Even when your rifle runs out of ammo, you're far from helpless.
- ••• Competent: You prefer the grace of a rapier to the tactlessness of a gun.
- •••• Expert: You could be on the Olympic fencing team.
- ••••• Master: You display an undeniable skill that has virtually been lost in the modern age.

Possessed by: Gang Members, Martial Artists, Police, Assassins, Duelists

Specialties: Knives, Swords, Stakes, Improvised Weapons, Aimed Strikes, Parries, Disarms

Performance

He was alone at the bar, away from the other poseurs in his lame-ass band. Curtain call. *She straightened her Rancid T-shirt and gave her bouffant one more pat. Marcy Conklin wasn't worried about her shitkicker accent — she'd honed it in her school's productions of* Li'l Abner *and* Streetcar *last year. Still, this audience of one was gonna be the toughest ever, and she needed no less than a four-star review. She approached and began to gush over him, giving him a dopey grin that made her want to puke. "Well, Jesus! What a show!"*

He pretended unconvincingly to sip his beer as he listened, then invited her to some "party" after the gig. I've got a better one, pal.

"Well, actually," she drawled, inwardly fighting her revulsion, "I wanna talk to you in private. In m'van out back."

She imagined him licking his fangs as he said, "Let's go."

Whereas Expression is the capacity to put words to paper, voice or email, Performance is the ability to take it to the stage. Your character is adept in a performing art and possesses not only the know-how but the stage presence to enrapture an audience. You must specialize in one field, although people skilled in one performing art form usually have some acquaintance with the others.

- • Novice: Garage band
- •• Practiced: Club circuit
- ••• Competent: Record label
- •••• Expert: Billboard
- ••••• Master: Hall of Fame

Possessed by: Musicians, Actors, Dancers, Some Talk-Show Hosts, College Kids

Specialties: Various Instruments, Singing, Acting, Dancing, Stage Presence, Comedy

Security

"Hello, this is Rich Gagnon. I'm not home right now, so please leave a message and I'll call you back. Thanks."

BEEP

"Hello, Richard, it's Alistair. Christian and I found a toothy fellow skulking around this afternoon, so we subdued him with a baseball bat. He's tied up in the basement. When he wakes, we're going to poke him with sticks and find out all about his mates. Christian's watching him right now.... Christian! Christian? Bugger all. He likely stepped out to smoke. Wait, there's the basement door now. Anyway, do visit quickly. Cheers."

CLICK

This Skill measures both your character's ability to secure an area or person, as well as his ability to bypass others' precautions. It entails the know-how to break into and out of buildings, hot-wire cars and even crack safes. Conversely, it allows your character to set up his own safeguards or recognize the weak points in a defense system.

- • Novice: You can tie and untie complex knots.
- •• Practiced: You can hot-wire vehicles.
- ••• Competent: You are familiar with most simple security systems.
- •••• Expert: You know almost every way to protect (or get at) a person or area.
- ••••• Master: Nothing is safe from you.

Possessed by: Burglars, Security Consultants, Law Enforcement, Stalkers

Specialties: Hot-Wiring, Electrical Systems, Escape, Combination Locks, Tumblers

Stealth

Getting over the gate was a breeze, and the guards were so bored they followed the distraction almost too quickly. But Erick nearly lost his grip on the rear balcony when he saw Gorman standing there, looking down at him. Gorman wore his hospital whites and held a tote bag full of personal belongings in one hand, a scalpel in the other. The instrument's blade was so caked with something that it reflected none of the perimeter lights.

"Dammit, Gorman," Erick hissed as he was helped up. "I told you we'd be coming through the west gate. What are you doing

here? And what the hell is that razor for?"

"They *told me there'd be a change of plans. As for this...."* *He held up the surgical tool. "Last-minute business."*

Your character knows how to avoid detection, regardless of whether he's hiding or on the move. This Skill also gives him the capacity to shadow other people unnoticed or to conceal items on his person or nearby. This Trait is often pitted against an opponent's Perception to determine whether your character is successful or not.

- • Novice: You are a hide-and-seek expert.
- •• Practiced: You could tail an unsuspecting person through a shopping mall.
- ••• Competent: You'd make a great cat burglar.
- •••• Expert: You can hide on a flat plain in broad daylight.
- ••••• Master: Your prey never sees you until your knife is in his back.

Possessed by: Thieves, Policemen, Military Special Forces, Reporters, Assassins

Specialties: Object Concealment, Urban Camouflage, Wilderness, Tailing Prey, Theft

Survival

The sun was rising when Michelle awoke. It looked like a boiling cauldron, fat and red. It burned like one, too. Another scorching summer day in the Caribbean. Red in the morning, sailors take warning. *She picked herself up off the deck to survey the boat. Between the punishment from last night's storm and the dead thing's rage, she was surprised the craft was still afloat. But it was. She thought she could patch the sails enough to catch the next storm's head winds, perhaps weather it out in a cay. She could see only waves, but they'd pushed out of St. George's two days ago, so she wasn't too far from the Antilles. After taking bearings from the few obstinate stars left in the sky, Michelle nosed the boat north.*

Although hunters find that most of their prey sticks to cities, a mark sometimes leads them deep into the unknown. Your character has the practical experience and instincts to survive in a friendless environment and can live there for days or even months if she has to. If your character tries to avoid detection in the wilderness, you can roll only as many dice in Stealth as she has in Survival.

- • Novice: Infrequent camping trips with the kids.
- •• Practiced: Eagle Scout
- ••• Competent: You could gather enough food in the woods to survive indefinitely.
- •••• Expert: You could elude an FBI search team for months.
- ••••• Master: African Bushman

Possessed by: Boy Scouts, Hunters (of animals), Survivalists, Hermits, Commandos, Sailors

Specialties: Woodlands, Desert, Ocean, Tracking, Food-Gathering, Shelter-Building, Hiding

Technology

"When I was a kid in Vermont, Grandpa and I would go out into the woods every winter with a bunch of buckets. I'd pick out the trees. We'd drive holes in them, insert taps and hang the buckets underneath. We'd come back later and check 'em. Sometimes there was nothing or the sap was bad: watery or just off. Sometimes we'd get a half-bucket of the purest silver you've ever tasted. Those were the ones I prayed for, the ones that made all the hiking and shivering worthwhile."

French opened the rusted wire box. He removed a tiny cassette from the recorder, inserted a new one, and adjusted the alligator clips on the multicolored telephone wires. As they were leaving the alley, he addressed Marshall again: "I've changed since then, but y'know, the fun never really does."

Your character is a true child of the modern age. He understands how electronic devices work and has a familiarity with the wide range available to him. Additionally, he possesses the know-how to repair or alter such devices. Technology does not apply to mechanical devices or physical art; that's the realm of Crafts. Likewise, computer technology — hardware and software — is the purview of the Computer Knowledge (p. 115).

- • Novice: You can program a VCR.
- •• Practiced: You know how to fix fuses and build simple crystal radios.
- ••• Competent: With tools and time, you could build a fairly complex device like a television or a motion detector.
- •••• Expert: You can alter almost any existing electronic equipment to make it do new and interesting things.
- ••••• Master: If modern technology could only keep up with you, you'd be performing digital miracles.

Possessed by: Engineers, Inventors, Repairmen, Spies

Specialties: Surveillance, Invention, Vehicles, Security, Customizations

Knowledges

Knowledges are solely the mind's domain and, as such, are generally paired with Mental Attributes. Although formal schooling is one way to pick up a Knowledge, there is seldom a better instructor than raw experience. Although some rolls involving general information may require only the Intelligence Attribute, most Knowledges are too specific for the populace at large to fake. Thus, if your character has no points in a given Knowledge, he can't make a roll involving it. If you don't have Medicine, you can't perform surgery.

Academics

"Here's something interesting." Angela looked up from her battered quarto. "You remember Erick telling me how he woke up last night and went outside to watch the western sky? And how all his neighbors were out at 3 a.m., doing the same thing? It also happened in ancient Rome right before Nero's big fire. The whole city just woke up and went stargazing."

Marshall's eyes widened. "'Die Nacht der Blicke zum Himmel'! *'The Night of Upturned Faces'! It's an early Goethe poem, from when he was at Strasbourg, written the year a smallpox epidemic nearly wiped out the city. 'For while the burghers scanned the stars/ Death slept among the beggars.'"*

"Maybe it's an omen for San Francisco — another earthquake, maybe?"

Suddenly, Marshall started as if pinched. "The water-project deaths!"

This Knowledge covers your character's general grounding in the "humanities" such as history, philosophy, literature and art. It allows him to know any kind of general information in these areas without having to resort to research. You must always choose a specialty for this Knowledge, regardless of rating.

If your character wishes to draw upon a piece of information from his scholastic background, the Storyteller may ask you to make an Intelligence + Academics roll, difficulty contingent on the obscurity of the material. Knowing the ancient capitols of Europe might be a 5; understanding the mysteries surrounding Francisco Goya's final seclusion would rate an 8. The Storyteller may deem that anything with a difficulty higher than 8 must be researched. The exception to this is any information pertaining to your character's specialty, which can be rolled for no matter what the difficulty.

- • Student: You watch a lot of *Jeopardy*.
- •• College: You majored in something with little earning potential.
- ••• Masters: Your articles appear in trade journals.
- •••• Doctorate: Tenured professor.
- ••••• Scholar: You are one of the leading authorities in your field.

Possessed by: Trivia Buffs, Instructors, Writers, Dilettantes
Specialties: Medieval Europe, the Catholic Church, Southeast Asia, Modernist Writers, Zen Buddhism

Bureaucracy

"Wow! Can I look at it?"

French pulled the paper from Pike's grasp. "Knock it off. The ink's still wet. You've never seen one of these before?" French sounded genuinely surprised.

Pike simply shrugged off the insult. "Not a real search warrant, no. That thing's better than a lockpick — the furry bastard's gotta let us in! Don't they keep pretty tight watch on those? I mean, how much did it cost you?"

"Not as much as the phony badges." French added a final, flourished signature to the bottom of the document. "Some stuff isn't as regulated as you'd think. You just have to know the right people — well, the right people's salaries."

Politics might get you a direct line to the governor, but he's closely monitored and his favors can extend only so far. Bureaucracy gives your character a pipeline to the unseen little people beneath him, the ones who push the papers. This Knowledge can be very useful when he wants to bypass red tape, ensure something damaging gets "misfiled" or needs access to restricted information. This Knowledge also measures your character's familiarity with the myriad gears of the government and represents his general organizational sense.

- • Student: You keep a daily planner.
- •• College: Minor functionary.
- ••• Masters: You know who to go to for the right favors.
- •••• Doctorate: You can keep track of an impressive volume of paperwork.
- ••••• Scholar: You could push a bill through Congress.

Possessed by: Lawyers, Politicians, Bureaucrats, Journalists
Specialties: Forgery, Stalling Tactics, Bribery, System Bypassing, Police Paperwork, Negotiation

Computer

You think I'm a hotshot? You shoulda met the girl who showed me the ropes: the 17-year-old daughter of my college thesis advisor. The old man used to stay out late at the faculty club, so I'd come over and we'd hang out. She'd show me how to find my way around a "firewall," and me... well... I'd break the law. Regularly. She used to just bop into systems and mess with shit. Just like now, when I knock that jack-off vampire's landing time back from four a.m. to six. Wouldn't ya love to be on that flight?

This Knowledge represents a general grounding in all aspects of computer use, from day-to-day operation to programming. Multiple points in this Trait give your character the know-how to break into other computers or protect her own from intrusion. This Knowledge also imparts familiarity with computer components and lets you make simple repairs.

- • Student: You email your friends often.
- •• College: You're familiar with most applications and some data processing.
- ••• Masters: You can design your own programs.
- •••• Doctorate: You innovate new horizons in silicon.
- ••••• Scholar: Gates, that hack!

Possessed by: Students, Programmers, Office Workers, Geeks, Engineers
Specialties: Hacking, Software Design, Security, Internet, Viruses, Data Retrieval

Finance

Hanson was on the phone with his broker before Pike could respond: "And option puts at current exercise prices on the following securities: Griffith Major, Standard Trust, Praxis Chemicals and Pacific Western. All of them, that's right. Just a feeling I have. Yeah. Bye."

"Feeling?" Pike didn't understand the jargon, but it sounded large.

"Yes... that all of Unocom's adopted children will be left to the wolves — once they discover their parent company's CEO has collapsed into ash. Thank you again, Peter."

"I prefer 'Pike.'"

Your character has an eye for making money, whether it's through playing the stock market or appraising fenced items. She can size up the assets and liabilities of any venture and maximize the efficiency of operating costs. This Knowledge is not just for stuffed-shirts, though: Plenty of successful pimps and drug dealers possess this know-how.

- • Student: You watched your dad run his business.
- •• College: You have some practical experience or a few years of business classes under your belt.
- ••• Masters: You can evaluate the weak points of any failing business.
- •••• Doctorate: Your financial savvy would allow you to prosper on Wall Street.
- ••••• Scholar: Everything you touch turns to gold. Just don't forget what happened to Midas.

Possessed by: Executives, the Disgustingly Rich, Accountants, Smugglers, Entrepreneurs, the Self-Employed, Stock Brokers

Specialties: Stock Markets, Accounting, Appraisal, Business Management, Economic Trends

Investigation

Detective DuPoe could think of a million places he wanted to be right now. Standing on the front lawn of a crime scene wasn't one of them. Sergeant Arniss walked down from the house and pulled him aside.

"Someone was looking for something. They hung some woman from a crossbeam and turned the place upside down."

"They find what they were looking for?"

"I don't think so. The back door was kicked out and the walls have fist-holes in them. They must've left pissed."

"Any idea what they wanted?"

"Here's my guess," Arniss held up an evidence bag with the key to a safe inside. The letters 'WW' were written in felt-tip on the head. "It was on — get this — the key rack. *The only thing that looked like it hadn't been messed with."*

DuPoe grinned. "Buncha illiterates," he muttered.

This Ability combines learning in formal investigative procedure with plain common sense. A character skilled in Investigation is a whiz at forensics and following — as well as covering up — leads. Your character may also be familiar with historically clever ways to perform tasks such as killing people or hiding items.

- • Student: Pulp novels
- •• College: *NYPD Blue*
- ••• Masters: Joe Friday
- •••• Doctorate: Philip Marlowe
- ••••• Scholar: Sherlock Holmes

Possessed by: Law Enforcement, Mystery Buffs, Criminals

Specialties: Shadowing, Forensics, Motives, Searching

Law

"Hey, you there! Up against the wall and spread 'em!"

Rook threatens Bishop. *Spaulding found himself being backed up against the manor's perimeter wall by two thugs wearing uniforms that looked smarter than their owners. He considered using Peina's* revolver, *then reconsidered.*

"As a junior partner of Sunderland, Vichy and Pratt, I must inform you of articles under the 1962 Stark Amendment." Hey, if these guys are trained security, *Spaulding tried to reassure himself,* then I'm a hotshot attorney. *"Under these provisos, hired security may* not *conduct a search and seizure without a sworn officer present." He gave this time to sink in as he plotted the rest of his bluff. "If you persist in your course, I will take you to court and I will* prosecute *you myself!"* Knight defends Bishop. Please.

The larger one reached for his gun, then thought better of it. "Take off," he growled.

Laws are a fact of life — as is breaking them, at least for hunters in an unsympathetic world. This Knowledge confers understanding of what your character can and cannot do, and what she can get away with. It gives her the know-how to file suit, avoid lawsuits and get herself out of jail (the legal way).

- • Student: You know how to stand up to The Man.
- •• College: A kid fresh out of law school or an experienced cop
- ••• Masters: A lawyer with a few years behind him
- •••• Doctorate: You went straight from your school's law review to a successful practice.
- ••••• Scholar: Your command of the law is exceeded only by your ability to utilize it.

Possessed by: Lawyers, Legislators, Law Enforcement, Criminals

Specialties: Civil Rights, Criminal Law, Police Procedure, Lawsuits, Trials, Loopholes, Corporate Law

Linguistics

A cruiser had already pulled up by the time they arrived. An old cop blocked their way into the demolished restaurant. Yasmine could see the cop's partner trying in halting Mandarin to calm a hysterical Chinese cook. She turned and saw Takahashi across the street, talking to a Japanese vendor at a wooden udon *cart festooned with red paper lanterns. After a flurry of* Doo moos *and bowing, Tak rushed back, grabbed her arm and pulled her aside.* "Okami otoko," *he muttered. "'Shapechangers' This way."*

"So what's the rush?" Tak's impatient stride was nearly keeping Yasmine airborne.

"He said, 'Kodomo ga yuukai-sareta.' *'Child.' He says they stole a child."*

Your character possesses a command of more languages, ancient or modern, than just his native tongue. Not simply

the capacity to understand additional languages, this Knowledge allows him to recognize accents, decipher word puzzles and perhaps get the gist of related vernaculars (Hindi and Rom, for example).

Linguistics is not required, nor does a "language choice" have to be declared to know, understand and use hunters' system of symbol communication; that capability comes intuitively to all hunters upon the imbuing. However, if certain symbols exist or develop that are known only by certain groups of hunters, perhaps by creed, a "language choice" might be dedicated to learn those exclusive icons. Your character could also need a willing teacher to master those symbols.

- • Student: One extra language.
- •• College: Two extra languages.
- ••• Masters: Four extra languages.
- •••• Doctorate: Eight extra languages.
- ••••• Scholar: 16 extra languages.

Possessed by: Travelers, Scholars, Cryptologists, Diplomats
Specialties: Ciphers, Hieroglyphs, Slang, Polite Speech

Medicine

Marcy sat on the edge of the cot, shivering, whispering the word cold *as she rocked back and forth. Michelle sat next to her, mechanically pumping the bulb of a blood-pressure cuff fastened just above the gash on Marcy's arm. The creature's blade had cut deeply. Sarin dug furiously through a cabinet.*

Michelle whirled to face Sarin. Hysteria tinged her voice: "Her blood pressure's dropping like a rock, Sarin! Just stick her with something!"

"Dammit, listen to me!" Sarin's voice magnified Michelle's fear tenfold. "She's gotta have a polyvalent antivenin! The wrong thing'll kill her faster than the poison!" His search became more frantic as vials rolled across the floor.

This Knowledge entails familiarity with the workings of the human body. Your character can diagnose and treat diseases, diagnose the seriousness of injury to himself and others, and administer first aid, among other things. He may also possess a working knowledge of hospital equipment, procedures and protocol.

- • Student: You worked as a lifeguard for a summer.
- •• College: Premed student or paramedic
- ••• Masters: You took the Hippocratic Oath.
- •••• Doctorate: Surgeon
- ••••• Scholar: You have the potential to be one of the great names in modern medicine.

Possessed by: Medical Staff, Paramedics, Lifeguards, Parents, Survivalists

Specialties: Natural Remedies, First Aid, Diseases, Poison, Pharmaceuticals, Prevention

Occult

M'funa walked out of the terminal and into New York. The people of his village had wept, and he'd had to sell the plantain farm to pay for passage from Freetown. But Djati had appeared before him as he slept, and his bones were cast. To postpone the journey as long as he had was rehit, *but to refuse was pure* tajini.

He hated the iron city. Its facelessness showed a spirituality long since withered. Perhaps Djati understood that his good skills were needed here. As he pondered, a man heavy with coarse braided spirits brushed by. The jojoi *sticks in M'funa's satchel called to the man, but he did not stop. M'funa knew wicked spirits chewed at the man's soul. His thoughts turned to the sacred* bo *ritual as he followed the man through the herd of unmindful people.*

This Knowledge gives your character access to centuries worth of rumor, hearsay and dark myth. It's up to him to separate mere speculation from hard facts. If he can, this Trait bolsters his fight with a wealth of insight. High levels of Occult provide your character with scattered insights into worlds beyond human comprehension — and the creatures that draw upon them. Intelligence + Occult can be rolled to know information about the world's monsters in general, but scarce or rare information — at least in human circles — has a high difficulty.

- • Student: A subscriber to *The Weekly World News*
- •• College: You've read some very scary books and found a ring of truth in them.
- ••• Masters: There's something else out there, and you have your own educated guesses.
- •••• Doctorate: You know various legends about monsters, their strengths and their weaknesses.
- ••••• Scholar: You are the Sir James Frazer of the new century.

Possessed by: Wiccans, the Superstitious, Animists, Fortune Tellers

Specialties: Curses, Folklore, Rituals, Infernalism, Hidden Worlds, White Magic

Politics

State Assessor Friedmann shook his head. "Well, I never looked at the figures before, but I guess the 1814 firehouse doesn't attract as many visitors as I'd thought."

"Not enough to merit a renewal of funding," Hanson said, adamant. "Certainly not with Pangloss Cosmetics ready to purchase and begin construction there immediately. It would doubtless be a badly needed feather in the mayor's cap toward his employment pledge. How's his approval rating lately, anyway?"

"The same. I don't foresee any trouble striking it from the registry, so technically we could raze it as soon as next month."

"And fill in the basement."

The balding assessor looked up, but only for a moment. He supposed that men who could afford to make campaign contributions like Roman-Smythe's were allowed their eccentricities. "First thing," he said.

Your character possesses a familiarity with political workings on a number of levels. He knows who to go to for certain favors, how they got their positions, and who answers to whom.

Politics differs from Bureaucracy in that the former grants your character some access to the powers-that-be themselves, whether local, national or international, depending on rating and specialty. Bureaucracy deals with the little people who keep the political machine running, but who don't possess much personal power.

- • Novice: You march in protests.
- •• Practiced: You've had a few run-ins with The System.
- ••• Competent: Your "contributions" go to all the right places.
- •••• Expert: You're able to spin gold from tangled political webs.
- ••••• Master: Your number is scribbled somewhere in the Oval Office.

Possessed by: Politicians, Lawyers, Night-Creatures, Activists, Lobbyists

Specialties: City, State, Federal, Bribery, Radical

Research

The Giovanni: Powerful. Passionate. Deadly. Plagued by a curse as old as their line. "Thrilling" — Donna Danelli, Newsweek; *"A Must-Read" — Radford Rose,* Times Book Review. *Soon to be a Paramount motion picture!*

McGowan could see the dust jacket now. The Giovanni family had to be the best-kept secret out of Italy, one never before detailed in print. Its smuggling, rackets and heavy-handed business deals were the stuff of book advances. But the enigmatic disappearances, several per generation across all branches of the family tree — that *was the cream in the cannoli.*

The family's historic secrecy was impenetrable. They made the Kennedys look like the Brady Bunch. But the best news so far had been the interest Lucretia Giovanni expressed in his project, inviting him to her estate for an interview. At last, all of his cross-referencing and study was about to pay off.

Your character may not have all the information in the world, but he knows places that damn near do. Research is a measure of how well your character finds his way around a storehouse of knowledge, be it a library, archive or the Internet. More than just the know-how to dig up material in one place, this Trait indicates the capability to perform inter-library searches and access restricted archives.

Research differs from Academics in that information must be sought with the former. It might simply be known with the latter.

- • Student: You can find the best porn on the web.
- •• College: You're aware that Dewey Decimal isn't related to Huey or Louie.
- ••• Masters: You not only know where to look, you know the best libraries in which to look.
- •••• Doctorate: After many years in such surroundings, you've come to think of archives as your second home.
- ••••• Scholar: If someone wrote it, you can find it.

Possessed by: Writers, Librarians, Archivists, Bureaucrats, Students, Researchers

Specialties: Specific Topic, Internet, Rare Book Collections, Genealogies, Government Archives, Police Documents

Science

"The tests from the rats are in," Dr. Viels said as he handed Angela the data sheet. "It's just as I thought. This new designer narcotic's more addictive than nicotine. And the pleasure studies show even greater results than Olds and Milner's classic study: Rats would rather starve than give up Hum. Which isn't surprising, given its affinity for the nigrastriatal pathway in the brain. Furthermore, the way it antagonizes serotonin uptake in the hypothalamus and medial forebrain suppresses all judgment capabilities in subjects, similar to Kluver-Bucy Syndrome. This is one scary narcotic."

"They say Hum's the new date-rape drug," Angela offered.

"Yeah, but that's not what frightens me. It's the drug's water-solubility aspect coupled with the ease with which it can be made. That scares me silly. I'm brushing my teeth with bottled water from now on."

Your character possesses a general knowledge of the physical sciences such as chemistry, biology, physics and geology, on both a practical and theoretical level. You must specialize in one field, but your character retains a basic knowledge of the others. This Knowledge also gives her the capacity to run experiments and analyze scientific data.

- • Student: You stayed awake in third-period Chemistry.
- •• College: You did your undergrad thesis on something unpronounceable.
- ••• Masters: You could work in a research company.
- •••• Doctorate: Your papers are frequently seen in respectable journals.
- ••••• Scholar: One of the leading minds of your time

Possessed by: Scientists, Drug Manufacturers, Engineers, Students, Instructors

Specialties: Chemistry, Physics, Astronomy, Biology, Geology, Archeology

Backgrounds

Backgrounds fill out your character almost as completely as do Attributes and Abilities, but in a different way. Whereas the latter two define your character's potential and what she can do, the former determines her history in terms of memories, people and possessions. Be sure to explain why you put points into a given Background and make sure it suits your character concept. A street punk with 4 Resources? Not impossible, but a story is required to make it plausible. Make your character's Background Traits a natural extension of her concept.

You may occasionally have to make rolls with Background Traits to obtain goods, services or information. For example, the Storyteller may rule that you have to make an Intelligence + Exposure roll to understand that the bat with the glinting red eyes isn't after mosquitoes.

Allies

A stodgy executive-type with iron-gray hair and a pince-nez on a chain stood before Pike's cell, looking in with thinly veiled disdain, "Mr. Peter Flask?"

"Pike."

He simpered. "Pike. I'm James L. Pratt, senior partner of Sunderland, Vichy and Pratt. I'm here to inform you that the firm is willing to pick up your case, courtesy of a benefactor."

Pike was skeptical. These guys were serious legal guns. He'd read about them during the Millhaven Slayings Trial. Who did he know that could afford this "Get out of Jail Free" card? Hanson, of course. Of Pike's acquaintances, only the proprietor of Roman-Smythe Munitions had the cash for this kind of rescue. But Hanson, the consummate businessman, never did favors, only made investments. And what sort of return was he expecting from this venture?

Your character has friends in high and low places and can occasionally call upon them in times of need. Depending on the number of dots assigned to this Background, your character might have a childhood friend in Homicide or perhaps he saved the governor's life back in Nam. Allies can't always help directly, but they may have their own resources that they can call upon. Unlike contacts (see below), allies don't need to be coaxed or manipulated into helping your character, but they are probably unaware of his struggle against the supernatural.

Like any friends, allies do not enjoy being used. Your character may have to interact with them outside of simply asking them for help. Additionally, granting favors is a two-way street: A friend in the FBI may call upon your character unexpectedly for assistance. Paying the piper can put a real dent in his personal agenda, but can be the stuff of which adventures are made.

- • One ally of moderate influence and power
- •• Two allies, both of moderate power
- ••• Three allies, one of whom is quite influential
- •••• Four allies, one of whom is very influential
- ••••• Five allies, one of whom is extremely influential

Arsenal

Gorman crawled to where Father St. George lay. They had predicted an ugly fight, but no one guessed that the bloodsuckers would have access to heavy weapons. Or that they'd be loaded with Talons. He examined the aging priest for life signs — he'd seen St. George take a few in the chest from the initial burst.

"I'm fine, dammit." The grizzled war vet brushed Gorman away and got to his feet painfully.

"Father!" Gorman was astounded. "You're alive!"

The priest grinned and thumped a fist to his trench coat and the body armor underneath. "There's faith and there's blind faith, son." He dug out a cigarette and lit it. "Never get 'em mixed up."

Your character may never have been a boy scout, but "be prepared" has always been his motto. He always knew evil was at work, he just didn't know what form it would take. Government agents, UFOs or demons straight from hell: he was ready for anything. So when he was Called, he brought the hard stuff to bear. They used to call your character "gun nut," "survivalist" or just plain "paranoid." Now they call him "savior."

Your character may not have much money, but over the years he has collected an impressive assortment of weapons and equipment valuable to his newfound calling. If he doesn't have a particular weapon or piece of gear on hand, he knows where to get it, whether legally or illegally. Legal possession of firearms probably means the government has a record of every weapon your character owns; illegal ownership may mean a prison sentence if he's caught. More dots in this Background increases the volume, firepower or rarity of the collection. The Storyteller has final say on what items may be available, and should establish the contents of a stash before play begins.

- You might own or have inherited a modest collection of rifles, shotguns and a few handguns. Equipment could include army-surplus rucksacks, rations or first-aid kits.
- •• You own a substantial collection of firearms: pistols and long guns, possibly including vintage semiautomatic military rifles (Civil War, WWI or WWII). Equipment could include high-power binoculars, urban camo fatigues or a police scanner.
- ••• You're a serious collector, owning various pistols, shotguns and even semiauto assault rifles. The gear in your basement could easily outfit a group of "rough-it" campers, and your supplies could include night-vision goggles, body armor or military-surplus radios.
- •••• You're a fixture at local gun shows and you make your neighbors nervous. Your sizable collection includes fully-automatic weapons (including submachine guns) and might contain exotic types

such as sniper rifles or rare antiques. Equipment could include police-issue sap gloves, electronic eavesdropping devices or lightweight tactical radios used by special forces.

●●●●● People like you give the ATF nightmares. Your large collection includes heavy weapons — vintage machine guns, mortars and grenades. They're old but serviceable. Modern equipment might include SWAT-team body armor, military-grade GPS navigation hardware or even surplus military vehicles.

Bystanders

Dear Mom and Dad,

By the time you read this, I'll be gone. I've left with Sarin. He's not really a Columbia med student like I told you. He's actually doing something that benefits humankind much more than medicine, but it's something he will never receive thanks for. So he needs support. He needs me with him and I love him. I've withdrawn all the money from my bank account, because I don't know when or if I'll be back. Please don't try to find me, because you won't be able to. Please don't think I'm leaving because of you or anything that you did. This is just something that I must do, in memory of Marcy. Maybe I can tell you all about it someday. I'll try to call you from the road. I love you and I'm sorry.

Michelle

Allies are your character's associates. Contacts are her eyes and ears. Yet both groups must be kept in the dark about your character's real life and agenda; they wouldn't understand if she told them the truth, and they might even unwittingly reveal her to the enemy. However, bystanders are your character's companions in her lonely vigil. Like her, they were exposed to the Message when it was delivered, but unlike her they failed to act at the scene. They haven't forgotten what they witnessed, though. They've seen the evil, too. Some are prepared to make amends for past indecision or fear, and they want to help your character directly. Others can be goaded into offering aid, but they never want to face that kind of horror again.

Although most bystanders are sympathetic to your character's cause, they have various reasons for helping her. Some stand with her out of love, for a debt unpaid or for the resources she can provide. Their camaraderie is not unflagging, though, and poor treatment drives them away. Additionally, bystanders may seek aid that they know your character can provide. Generally, bystanders are not as powerful as hunters in head-on battles with the supernatural. They have no second sight or edges and should not be expected to participate, except in dire circumstances. Help from bystanders typically takes the form of aid your character could expect from her own family.

- ● One bystander
- ●● Two bystanders
- ●●● Three bystanders
- ●●●● Four bystanders
- ●●●●● Five bystanders

Contacts

"Food at the shelter gotten any better?" Sarin tossed a small paper bag into the ragged man's lap.

"Cream of rat's ass soup, as usual." Arnie thrust a mittened paw into the greasy sack and pulled out a wax-paper bundle, "Hey, a steak bomb! Sarin, you're a saint!" The lines in the homeless man's face became trenches as he tried to fit one end of the sandwich into his mouth.

"Any news?"

Arnie finished his first bite, belched and wiped his mouth. "Some-a the brothers at the mission is talkin' how the Reapers been movin' down into Fountain Park. That's Wolfpack territory. We all stayin' outta there for now — gang war's comin'.... Oh yeah, Jackson says three guys come 'round describin' a fella sounds like you, askin' where he lives. They isn't too savory lookin', so he sends 'em into West Mortone. See if they come out agin.'"

"They will."

Your character has developed a steady base of people who can provide him with a stream of information and services. These contacts are rarely friends, more often people who know your character and may offer help if properly bribed, coerced or manipulated. There are two types of contacts: major and minor.

Major contacts have some degree of standing within their respective fields and, with the right offer, can provide helpful information regarding those areas. Minor contacts are informants spread throughout the city. Minor contacts can be used as eyes and ears, but they aren't as informative as major contacts. Newsstand vendors, bouncers, bartenders, security guards, police dispatchers and paramedics are all good examples of minor contacts. If your character wants to get in touch with minor contacts, roll Contacts rating (difficulty 7) with each success representing a minor contact found. They still require the proper incentive to help, though.

Neither type of contact — major nor minor — recognizes your character as a hunter, and would probably be frightened away if they did.

- ● One major contact and a handful of minor ones.
- ●● Two major contacts and a few minor ones scattered about the area.
- ●●● Three major contacts and minor ones in every club or police precinct.
- ●●●● Four major contacts and minor contacts spread throughout the city.
- ●●●●● Five major contacts, and you seldom go anywhere without seeing a minor one.

Destiny

Spaulding watched his silent companion as she stared transfixed at the nightstalker's burning remains. He knew she was only with them for the ride, that she would get off sooner or later to fulfill other, secret agendas. That didn't sadden him. Quite frankly, she scared him shitless. He'd seen her fight the bloodsucker like he was just another kid on the playground. She wasn't afraid of anything — "Willing to kiss Death on the lips and then knee him in the crotch," to quote Eph.

The stranger never told him how she always managed to emerge untouched from every fight — she couldn't... or wouldn't. The woman seemed to be mute and refused to stand still long enough to explain herself in writing. She had a keen intelligence, too; it stunned Spaulding sometimes. He never told Ephie before she was killed, but once, inside the chapel, he saw the barest flicker of the strange woman's aura. Something quiet and green and powerful. Yeah, she scared him.

Everyone has her role in shaping the future, but people with Destiny seem to have an enormous part to play. Perhaps your character has been selected from among all other imbued for some purpose. Maybe only she has insight into the way the monsters *really* are. Your character may be aware of her importance in time's procession, or she may be ignorant of the fact until someone points it out. Nonetheless, she carries her destiny like a standard and may be respected, feared or envied by those who recognize her significance. A "blessed one" may be watched closely and criticized when she doesn't seem to follow what is believed to be her true path. Others may even try to utilize your character's higher calling to their own ends. Destinies are enigmas, though, and no one has a clear idea of what awaits your character.

Yet Fate is not unwavering. Destined people have been known to die before fulfilling their roles. Such deaths are seldom inglorious and never unimportant.

For each dot your character possesses in this Background, you can make one re-roll per game session. If a single roll fails or does not achieve the successes that you hoped for, you can roll again. Only one re-roll is allowed for any given action. Re-rolls are even allowed for Conviction-invested edge rolls, perhaps avoiding the loss of any risked Conviction points.

The Storyteller must decide what your character's destiny is and he can work it into his chronicle. He may or may not make you privy to your character's fate.

- • You have a certain funny feeling about your future.
- •• You are bound to make an indelible impact on the lives of many others.
- ••• Your destiny is powerful, perhaps as a respected innovator or leader.
- •••• Your destiny is one of Arthurian legend.
- ••••• The course of the world may be revolutionized by your fate.

Exposure

It was the point in the act that Marcy despised: the love scene. The time when the boundaries between hunter and prey blurred. It was foul, but necessary. Like anyone else, bloodsuckers were at their most vulnerable during intimate moments. As the creature moved to her neck, Marcy's heart jackhammered, spurred by a mixture of fear, anger and anticipation.

She'd been bitten before she was Called, back in her stupid goth phase when she used to hit clubs armed with a fake ID, black lace and a sick dose of nihilism. The fact that she was still breathing proved that these monsters don't always drink their victims dry, and not every bite creates another vampire. Surprisingly, it didn't even hurt; it actually felt kinda good, back before the Call. This time it hurt. She prayed Sarin and Michelle were sneaking over to the van at that moment.

Your character had a run-in with the supernatural before she was imbued. Maybe she saw a pack of wild dogs tear through the shopping mall or was part of a cult based on something more tangible than deluded faith. She never understood the encounter fully and shut it out, rationalized it desperately or simply dismissed it. Now that she has been chosen, your character understands her past experience for what it was. This information gives her insights into the supernatural from time to time. But be forewarned that a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. Some perceptions are deceptive. Your character may know just enough about the supernatural to get into trouble, but not enough to survive it.

Detail the past event or circumstances. When your character identifies a supernatural creature, the Storyteller may make a Wits + Exposure roll on your behalf to see if your character can draw upon her previous experience in regard to this new encounter. As far as your character can tell, not all monsters are the same, so some abominations may still be baffling to her. The Storyteller should always make Exposure rolls in secret and feed potentially lethal misinformation after botches.

- • You frequently went dancing at some notorious spots.
- •• You can now explain that unexplainable encounter you had as a kid in the spooky old mansion.
- ••• You've seen miraculous coincidences occur that are starting to seem less and less coincidental.
- •••• One of your patients always used to arrange after-dark meetings. You realize that your initial diagnosis for the cause of his neuroses was all wrong.
- ••••• You lived in a community — perhaps Gypsy or Native American — that took the supernatural for granted. You now understand something of what you've seen and heard.

Fame

It was inevitable. "Hey, aren't you the guy who saved that kid from the wild-dog attack?"

Jamal smiled feebly. The story had splashed the papers, thanks in part to Yasmine spilling his name in the ambulance.

It had been a grim week of news, so the media inflated the rescue. Preferring to regain his anonymity, he'd turned down all the interviews, but it was impossible to swim against the tide of editorials and radio talk shows. Now he had to shake this guy, too.

"You're one brave sonuvabitch! This city's got one helluva dog problem. I say turn a giant fire hose on 'em." The man's voice became conspiratorial as he added, "Filled with molten silver." Jamal stopped edging away, his patronizing smile abandoned.

"That's right," the man said, winking. "Think you're the only 'dogcatcher' in town?"

Your character is recognized and widely respected by people for something. Fame often walks hand in hand with fortune, as many famous writers, athletes and actors can attest. It doesn't always, though; without accompanying points in Resources, your character's fame may be the fleeting kind usually brought on by the media. Fame certainly has its benefits. People want to be seen with your character, he may wield significant influence, and he might receive prestigious invitations and privileges.

Fame can also be a nuisance, especially for hunters who want to stalk their prey unseen. Yet enemies may not be able to eliminate your character outright; they may not want to reckon with the attention and inquiries his death would bring. At the Storyteller's discretion, Fame may also reduce the difficulties of Social rolls against particularly impressionable people.

- • You're a regular at a certain club or the host of a cable-access show.
- •• You're a local celebrity among a certain set, maybe a college-sports phenomenon or a morning-TV-show host. People recognize your face.
- ••• You're known to almost everyone in the area, perhaps as a figure in a popularized trial.
- •••• Your name is known across the nation — almost everyone has heard it.
- ••••• Your name turns up at least once on any given evening of television.

Influence

It was quiet in the old cathedral. All the parishioners had raised their heads and left, save one. The bishop waited until all the altar boys were gone, then walked over to the penitent and laid a gentle hand on his shoulder.

The bishop's whisper did not match the softness of his hand. "What is it now, Houston?"

The kneeling figure didn't look up. "Arthur Cohen's trial is coming up. Judge Sorben is a good Catholic — comes here every week, right? I want you to throw the diocese behind Cohen in support of vigilantism. Publicly. Tell the other orders, too."

"Unthinkable!" The bishop's voice lowered to a whisper again. "It'll cost you four." Houston reached into his coat and handed over four of the remaining 12 Polaroids. The bishop glanced, turned crimson and crumpled them in his fist. "Houston," he sighed, "I wish you'd come back into the fold."

The "penitent" snorted a laugh.

Your character is able to direct political and social processes and some authorities including the police by any of several means, such as wealth, political office, prestige or manipulation. This Background is a measure of the weight he can throw around in his community, particularly through the justice and executive systems.

There are times when you may have to roll Influence in lieu of another Ability, such as Bureaucracy or Politics, especially when dealing with the public mindset. Naturally, it is much more difficult to effect changes on a national level than on a local one.

- • Moderately influential; a factor in local politics
- •• Well-connected; a force in city politics
- ••• Position of influence; a factor in regional politics
- •••• Broad personal power; a force in state politics
- ••••• Vastly influential; a factor in national politics

Mentor

Old Zebulon — with his pain-in-the-ass intuition — was dying. His face had taken on the ashen color of the monsters he'd slain, and the doctors stopped discussing his condition by his bedside. He insisted that it was a passing virus.

Mr. Nelson's biology class: Frog-dissection Day. Spaulding made his first incision and found a black jelly, clinging and noxious, covering his frog's insides. Mr. Nelson came over and grinned. "Looks like yours had cancer, Spauld."

"They killed Eph," Spaulding muttered to the shrunken figure on the bed. "Hung her by her neck."

Zebulon was unfazed. "Then you'd best leave town. They'll be looking for you next. Where's that damn quiet woman—" Zeb winced, his face becoming an apple doll's.

"Why don't you take your medicine?"

"Don't need dope. Dulls the brain. Use what I taught you and find that mute. She's in for trouble, but you're safest with her for now. Call me from L.A."

Slaying otherworldly creatures is a skill learned through hard knocks, if at all. Some lucky hunters learn what they know with guidance. Your character has a teacher, whether in the tricks of destroying zombies or in life overall.

A high Mentor rating suggests a fellow hunter, perhaps one of the first, who teaches your character to survive, too. A low Mentor ratings indicates a "mundane" teacher, someone learned in the world, even if it's not the same terrible one your character knows. The latter may be an excellent teacher of combat skills or common sense, but can be difficult to call upon in touchy situations. Some mentors maintain an aloof teacher-student relationship, others become friends and even lovers. No mentor, however, has an inexhaustible amount of patience. A mentor

who feels burdened by an ungrateful or troublesome apprentice soon seeks a more worthy charge.

- Your mentor is able to train you in one or two general Abilities and offer some advice.
- •• Your mentor is moderately influential and connected, and often provides helpful advice.
- ••• Your mentor is probably another hunter.
- •••• Your mentor is a gifted hunter with considerable experiences, insight and connections.
- ••••• Your mentor is a relatively legendary hunter; she may even be known and feared by the enemy.

Patron

"Look man, I know what I saw and I know it wasn't the drugs."

"Demons in doctor suits? A dream in which you rid this hospital of the plague?"

"Yeah, but an earlier one told me to lock my window last month, and that was the night the strangler got into the ward. Remember that?"

"It was also the night of the tropical storm. You probably remember Nurse Jacobs telling you that. Look, I think they're giving you too many BZDs. I hear that happens sometimes. My session with Dr. Howard is tomorrow, you want me to ask him for you? You start with that stuff again, they'll never let you out. You want to see Rachel again, right?"

"Yeah. You know, they said something about you, too...."

"Way too many BZDs.... Hey! The Ping-Pong table's free again!"

The Messengers keep visiting your character, even after his imbuing. An otherworldly hand continues to shake him and confront him with warnings or horrific visions. The signs are often short and enigmatic, arriving with little warning. Your character may feel something akin to what epileptics experience just before an episode — a brief haziness or unfamiliar smell — then it hits. Contact is seldom pleasant; it's disorienting, nauseating or infuriating. Any messages are shrouded in a miasma of images and emotions that don't immediately make sense. Otherworldly voices and bizarre dreams are obvious choices. Other, more eerie messages include billboard lines that scramble into cryptic warnings or ATM machines that urge or advise your character.

Before he understands what's happening, your character may be presumed sick or insane, whether by himself or by others. Even if he understands the meaning of the messages, he may attribute them to deities, aliens or psychic powers. Most characters with Patrons tend to keep the nature of their messages to themselves. After all, they burned Joan of Arc for less.

Storytellers may use this Background as an opportunity to offer clues to players and to foreshadow events to come. The Storyteller may also decide the reason your character is contacted relatively frequently.

- You are contacted now and again, perhaps three or four times since you were imbued.
- •• You are contacted a few times a season or so, apparently with dire messages only.
- ••• You receive messages a few times every month.
- •••• You are contacted at least once every week, with information of seemingly various import.
- ••••• You are contacted so frequently that you take pre cautions against mishaps by refusing to swim or drive alone, for example.

Resources

Security at the Roman-Smythe estate had tripled recently, and the old alarms were replaced with lasers and electronic barricades. The system performed well, repelling a wave of would-be intruders. Yet the stranger in Hanson Roman-Smythe's bedroom apparently had entered unhindered.

"We've been watching you," the figure announced. His custom-fit suit was a sharp contrast to Hanson's baggy nightclothes. "The way you maneuvered the others into ashing Clearwater nearly doubled your holdings, didn't it? Pure genius, really. You're practically one of us already. All that remains is the initiation." He smiled toothily. "Merely a formality."

"Don't... don't I get a choice?" Hanson felt numb.

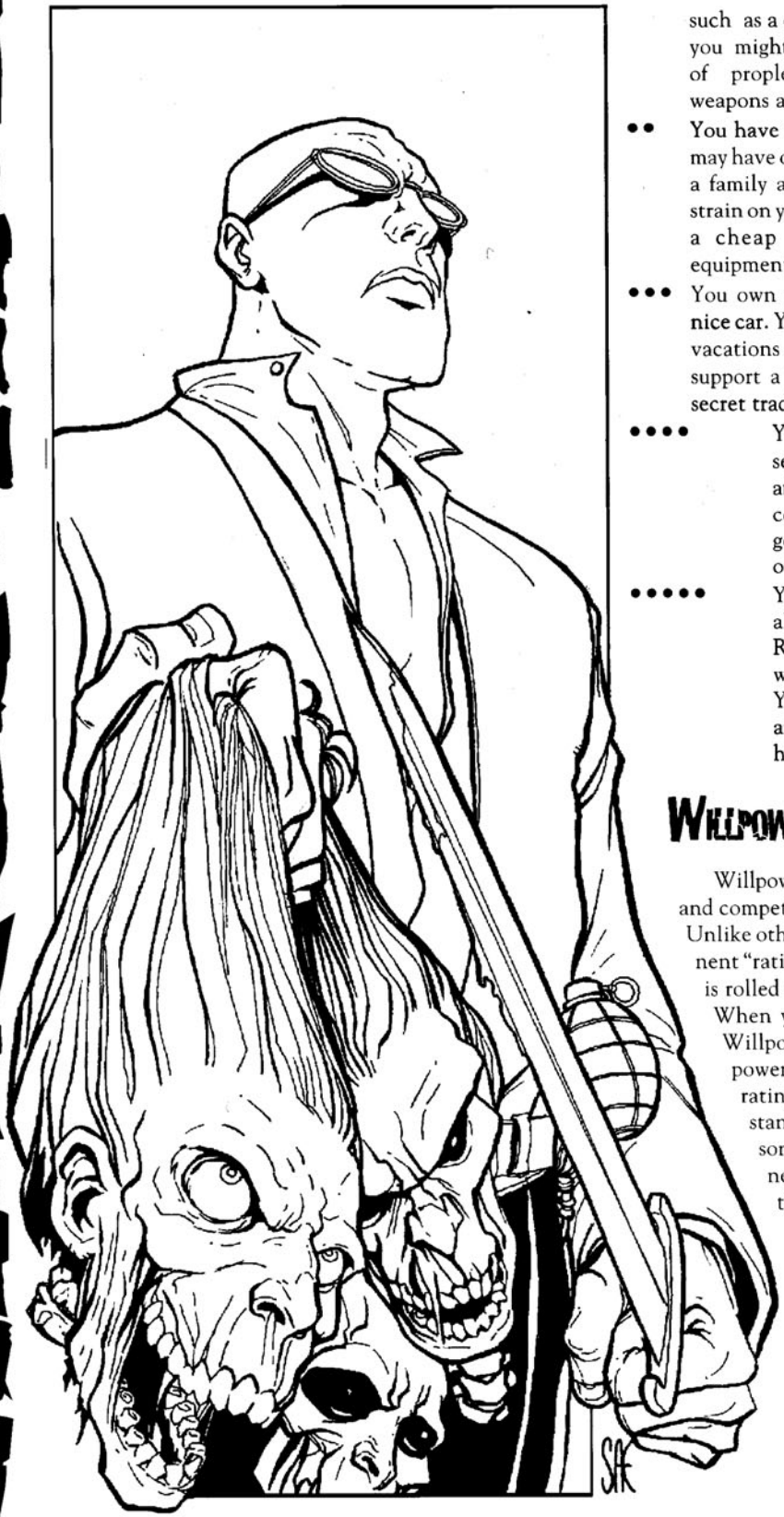
"I suppose... not to be cliché, but since you know about us, I'd have to kill you otherwise. It's our law." The stranger dropped into the Chippendale by the window. "Need time to decide? I'll wait."

Hanson shuddered in his canopy bed. Panic blotted his mind. That's when the intruder added casually, "On second thought, I've changed my mind: You have no choice. Consider it a violent takeover."

Resources describes your character's standard of living rather than his liquid assets. Almost everyone has at least a point or two in this Trait — otherwise your character has a small apartment, a beat-up car and can afford only basic hunting tools, such as an illegal gun and some ammo. Alternatively, a character without a Resources rating is practically penniless: a bum on the street or still living with his parents. Detail whence any income derives; neglect or wanton spending can quickly reduce it to nothing. Your character can liquidate possessions for more cash, but the faster he wants to do this, the less money he gets. Many hunters reduce their assets to almost nothing in the wake of being imbued, when money can become meaningless compared to destroying evil personified or protecting loved ones.

Note that Resources may provide cash for weapons and paramilitary equipment, but your character probably doesn't start with any, nor does she necessarily know how to acquire such items.

- You live in a condo or apartment in a clean part of town. You have the money for a few splurges,



such as a computer or a nice car. Alternatively, you might live in squalor and support a number of prople or are able to afford a variety of weapons and gear.

•• You have a "real" job and your first home. You may have one nice car or two old ones. Supporting a family and maintaining the hunt puts a real strain on your finances. Alternatively, you live in a cheap apartment but can afford good equipment for the mission.

••• You own some property and perhaps a second nice car. You can afford to take frequent overseas vacations and build a stock portfolio. You can support a family *and* pay for the tools of your secret trade.

•••• You own an enviable house or perhaps several small pieces of property. You can afford a membership at a prestigious country club, even though you don't golf much. Fellow hunters look to you to outfit the group.

••••• You are a multimillionaire. There's almost nothing (and no) one out of your Rolex-clad arm's reach. Be careful: Such wealth often engenders dangerous envy. You can afford almost any weapon or armament, provided you can get your hands on it.

Willpower

Willpower measures your character's inner drive and competence at overcoming unfavorable odds. Unlike other Traits, Willpower has both a permanent "rating" and a temporary "pool." The rating is rolled or tested, whereas the pool is "spent." When you spend a point of your character's Willpower, cross off the point from his Willpower pool (the squares), not the Willpower rating (the circles). The *rating* stays constant — if you need to roll Willpower for some reason, base the roll on the permanent rating. The *pool* is used up during the story.

Your character's Willpower pool likely fluctuates a great deal during the course of a story or chronicle. It decreases by one point every time you use a Willpower point to enable your character to do something extraordinary, like maintain self-control or gain an automatic success. Eventually, your character has no Willpower

left and can no longer exert the effort he once could. A character with no Willpower pool is exhausted mentally, physically and spiritually, and has great difficulty doing *anything*, as he can no longer muster the mettle to undertake an action or cause. Willpower points can be regained during the course of a story (see below), though you are advised to be careful and frugal with your character's Willpower pool.

The Willpower Trait is measured on a 1 to 10 scale rather than a 1 to 5 scale. A starting hunter character is assumed to have a Willpower rating of 3, unless it's increased with freebie points.

•	Spineless
••	Weak
•••	Unassertive
••••	Diffident
•••••	Certain
••••••	Confident
•••••••	Determined
••••••••	Controlled
•••••••••	Iron-willed
••••••••••	Unshakable

Spending Willpower

Willpower is one of the most active and important Traits in **Hunter: The Reckoning**. Because there are so many ways to expend, regain and use Willpower, it fluctuates more than any other Trait (besides Conviction) in the game. Willpower is a very versatile Trait, so make sure you understand how to use it.

• You may spend one of your character's Willpower points to gain an automatic success on a single action. The action roll is made normally. A single die that indicates a failure is set aside and considered an automatic success, to be combined with any other successes achieved in the roll. If all the dice rolled are successes, another is added to the total for the Willpower point spent.

Only one point of Willpower may be used in a single turn in this manner, but the success is guaranteed and may not be canceled, even by botches. By using Willpower in this way, it is possible to succeed at a given action simply by concentrating. For extended rolls, these extra successes may make the critical difference between accomplishment and failure.

Note: You must declare that you are spending a Willpower point *before* you make an actual roll for your character's action; you can't cancel a botch retroactively by spending a Willpower point at the last minute. Also, the Storyteller may declare that a Willpower point may not be spent on a given action.

• Sometimes, the Storyteller may rule that your character takes some action automatically based on instinct or urge — for example, stepping back from a chasm or taking cover from an explosion. The Storyteller may allow you to spend a Willpower point and avoid performing this reactive maneuver. It should be noted that the instinct may return at the Storyteller's discretion; you may need to spend multiple Willpower points over the course of a few turns to stay on task. Sometimes the urge may be overcome by the force of your character's will; at other times, your character has no choice but to follow his instinct (i.e., your character runs out of Willpower points or you no longer wish to expend them).

• A Willpower point may be spent to prevent a derangement from manifesting, with the Storyteller's permission. Eventually, if enough Willpower points are spent (as determined by the Storyteller), the derangement may be overcome and eliminated, as enough denial of the derangement remedies the aberration.

• By spending a Willpower point, wound penalties can be ignored for one turn. This allows your character to override pain and injury in order to take one last-ditch heroic (or villainous) action. However, Willpower may not be spent in this manner for an Incapacitated character.

• Willpower cannot be spent toward using edges in any way, whether it be getting an automatic success on an edge roll or making an attack roll with a weapon created through an edge (such as with Cleave). Modifying edge rolls is strictly the province of Conviction (see p. 132).

Regaining Willpower

Willpower may be recovered as well as spent. The following situations earn your character back a point or more of Willpower, though her Willpower pool may never exceed her Willpower rating. The only way to increase your character's Willpower *rating* is through experience-point expenditure.

Generally, your character's Willpower pool may be replenished whenever she fulfills a goal or has an opportunity to restore her self-confidence. Ultimately, specific instances of Willpower restoration are up to the Storyteller. For this reason, Storytellers are advised to be prudent in allowing characters to regain Willpower; it is a powerful and versatile Trait, and permitting players to rely on it too much undermines much of the challenge of a story.

• Characters' Willpower pools replenish fully at the end of a given story (and that's *story*, not *session*). The Storyteller may restrict this by requiring that the characters achieve (or partially achieve) a goal or otherwise boost their self-esteem. For example, if the story ends in a stalemate for the characters, who didn't destroy a powerful monster but did manage to obstruct its immediate plans, allow them to replenish their Willpower pools.

• (Storyteller's Option) Characters regain one Willpower point each day upon waking. This approach is easy on the bookkeeping and allows a steady stream of Willpower replenishment.

• (Storyteller's Option) If a character attains some extraordinary goal or fulfills an outstanding objective, the Storyteller may reward her with a point of Willpower pool. For example, if a hunter manages to keep a gang of vampires from breaking into his home and killing his family, the character may regain a point of Willpower (and perhaps more).

• (Storyteller's Option) If a character behaves in a manner that fulfills her Nature Archetype, the Storyteller may reward the character with one to three Willpower points (as stated in the Archetype descriptions). For example, if a Director character creates a plan of attack against a skinchanger, and the plan comes off without a hitch, that character may be given a point of Willpower.

Storytellers are encouraged to create their own systems or modify ones presented here to suit their troupe's style of play. Indeed, the manner in which a Storyteller allows, or refuses to allow, Willpower replenishment can determine the overall mood of a chronicle. A word of caution: Give Willpower rewards judiciously, as Willpower can destroy a story if the Storyteller lets the Trait fall to abuse.

Virtues

During your character's normal life, she had values, principles and beliefs, whether about right and wrong, good and evil or Heaven and Hell. Her values were probably shades of gray between the black-and-white contrasts of any subject: "There might be a God, but a place where souls go after death? I don't know...." Your character's ideas and principles were probably fairly typical, shared by others, even if not locally or to her knowledge.

All that changed when your character was in the wrong place at the wrong time — *almost* coincidentally when evil manifested. Suddenly, she was imbued. All of her previous perceptions and ideals were instantly invalidated. Everything she'd taken for granted was shown to be false, the world proved never to have been the place it seemed. The slate was wiped clean, and she was forced to start all over again.

Yet even in this nightmarish new reality, your character's ideals and beliefs have a fundamental impact on who she is, whether she realizes it or not. Your character's reaction to the walking horrors around her determines the direction of her new existence. In the moment of the imbuing, the Heralds, for lack of a better term, seem to measure her utility in a war against the supernatural.

Although hunters aren't aware of any classification of their kind, three approximate identity types emerge among the imbued, based on their previous philosophies. Members of these groups share roughly similar approaches to and ideas about monsters and the hunt, from the moment they're reborn to the moment they become statistics of the ongoing war. The three groups, known for game purposes as Virtues, are Zeal, Vision and Mercy. They are all different takes on how monsters should be dealt with: tooth for a tooth, eye for an eye; with a mind to an ultimate end to the war and with questions such as "what are you" and "what are we?"; or with judicious compassion for creatures that may suffer as much in this reality as the downtrodden suffer in any world.

A nascent hunter's very personality therefore decides his identity and purpose against the supernatural, whether to destroy it, understand it or to save what can be recouped. The Virtues decide who hunters are and become. One of these dedications is your character's primary Virtue. You get three Virtue points to spend at character creation. Your character's rating in her primary Virtue cannot be exceeded by a rating in any other Virtue throughout her existence. If her primary Virtue is Mercy, her ratings in Zeal and Vision can never exceed her Mercy rating (they can equal Mercy, but never be higher).

The Three Virtues

Each of the three Virtues means something different for each hunter; no two people can agree on how far the hunt should be taken, what plan should be implemented to fight the unknown, or which beings are worth sparing and which are not. Hunters take up the cause for their own reasons and often die on their own terms. Yet the three Virtues — the lenses that focus hunter perception — can be generalized. You should decide your own character's reasons for waging war on the supernatural and what she hopes to achieve from it. The answers you arrive at reflect her primary Virtue.

Mercy

This Virtue assumes that there is something worth saving in all beings. It values respect and courtesy above all. Nothing can be taken unless an effort to give is made in exchange. Solutions to problems lie in the middle ground, not in opposed camps.

The Merciful look upon the monsters plaguing the world and search for ones who make up for the wrongs of the rest. If the creatures derive from people gone wrong, perhaps those people can be saved. This perspective doesn't make the Merciful naive, however; the remorseless must be put down to save the defenseless, to protect any purity that might still exist. Indeed, when charged to protect the free and unspoiled, the Merciful become more dogged and dangerous than even the most extreme Zealot.

Vision

This Virtue is founded on questions and the search for answers. Life is complex and baffling. How can anyone claim to understand anything if they don't ask all the questions and look for all the answers? Rash

actions or decisions can cause more harm than good. Thoughtfulness and freedom are key to unity and cohesion.

Vision applies to the hunt in refusing to acknowledge accepted truths and in scrutinizing assumptions. Monstrosities might seem to control the world, but is it worthwhile to destroy every one of them on the streets when the ones in power just create more? What's the plan? What's the goal of the hunt? Running in circles covers no ground. How can people be free of supernatural tyranny once and for all?

Zeal

This Virtue is the fundamental belief in a cause for its own sake, whether it be a religion, a right, a movement or simply a refusal to accept the status quo. Right and wrong draw definite lines, with narrow or no shades of gray. There is an ideal answer to whatever problems arise, and it should be sought after, fought for if necessary.

Zeal applies to the hunt in simple intolerance of the supernatural. The world is clearly at the mercy of obscene creatures that corrupt everything they touch. Their hand should be severed and their lives should be snuffed out. Half-measures mean half-freedom or half-justice. What can be worth having that isn't worth dying for?

Virtues and Creeds

Your character's role in the hunt doesn't stop at her Virtues. Virtues are like department titles at the workplace. Your hunter also has a personal job title. In **Hunter: The Reckoning** a character's job is her creed: Her purpose or the role she performs in the hunt (see Chapter 3 for more on creeds). Each of the creeds adheres to a Virtue, which is called its primary Virtue. Zeal's creeds are Avenger, Judge and Defender. Mercy's creeds are Redeemer, Martyr and Innocent. Vision has only one creed of which hunters are aware: Visionary. Thus, Zeal is the primary Virtue of Avengers, Judges and Defenders. Mercy is the primary Virtue of Redeemers, Martyrs and Innocents. Vision is the primary Virtue of Visionaries.

Your character largely carries out the hunt according to the tenets of her primary Virtue, but with the direction and guidance of her creed. A character with a primary Virtue of Zeal believes in the destruction of the supernatural. However, if she's a Judge, she accomplishes that goal through strategy, cool calculation and temperance. A Defender adherent of Zeal seeks to destroy the supernatural through counterstrikes,

feints and simple wearing down of the enemy, all the while protecting the enemy's true target. An Avenger, on the other hand, believes in destruction through direct and bold action. The Avenger isn't stupid, simply decisive and straightforward.

During character creation, you can choose what kind of creed to which your character belongs before establishing her Virtues, yet the two are interconnected. Creed is a direct result of your character's primary Virtue, and her primary Virtue must be compatible with her creed. As far as hunters' unidentified creators seem to care, the imbued set their own course against the night and are simply empowered to follow it. Characters do not possess Virtues or creeds — or edges — until they're imbued.

Multiple Virtues

Your character has a creed and primary Virtue, but she can also have scores in any of the Virtues, regardless of which is her primary. (Your character's primary Virtue rating simply cannot be exceeded by her other Virtue ratings.) Scores in multiple Virtues represent an understanding of the various goals of the hunt — not only to destroy, for example, but to rationalize with and perhaps even spare some supernaturals. There is rarely one solution to any situation in the World of Darkness. Hunters with a broad perspective understand this and can choose the best solution to the problem at hand. Your character *can* blow up the building in which a zombie holds hostages; she gets the walking corruption, but defenseless people are killed in the process. Alternatively, tricking the zombie or even considering its demands in hopes of putting the tormented soul to rest might resolve the situation harmlessly.

The capacity to possess ratings in any of the Virtues almost seems to suggest that the Heralds want some imbued to have a broad foundation. Such hunters don't necessarily become overtly powerful, but they do prove capable and versatile. Your hunter's Virtues are used to acquire her edges. A strong foundation in multiple Virtues offers a hunter access to various edges, not just those of a single Virtue or creed. For example, a Redeemer can have points in Zeal and Vision — and therefore have edges from the paths of Zeal or Vision creeds. A diversified character thus brings more weapons to the hunt, which offers her more options than a highly specialized, narrow-minded ally has. Thus, these versatile, moderate hunters seem to contrast with their focused and perhaps intense allies. But, of course, the question is, to what end is this difference fostered?

Remember, *all* of your character's Virtues can be increased during play (see Conviction, p. 139), but her primary Virtue score can never be exceeded by those of her other Virtues.

Virtues and Edges

Your character's edges are the powers bestowed upon her at the moment of being imbued. For a complete list of edges, see Chapter 5. The edges available are a direct result of your character's creed and Virtue points, and how those points are allocated.

Edges belong to paths according to creed. The powers listed under the Innocence creed form the Innocence path. The powers listed under the Judgment creed make up the Judgment path. Your character's primary path is that of her creed. The primary path of a Martyr-creed character is the Martyr path. Your character's progress along this path regulates what other powers she's allowed to have.

Edges must be acquired in increasing order on a path. You cannot buy the level-one Defender power and then jump to the level three; each edge along a path is the prerequisite for the one immediately higher.

Virtues determine what edges you can acquire. You can choose an edge from any creed's path for which your character has an appropriate Virtue. Thus, a character with a Mercy rating can have powers from any of the Redeemer, Martyr or Innocent paths. A character with a rating in Zeal can have edges from any of the Avenger, Judge or Defender paths. It doesn't matter whether these other paths are your character's primary path, or if these other Virtues are your character's primary Virtue.

The only stipulation to choosing edges from paths other than your character's primary path is this: Edge ratings in other paths cannot exceed your highest-rated primary edge. Thus, a Visionary with the level-three Visionary edge can have powers belonging to other paths. Those other edges simply cannot be rated four or higher. A Defender with the level-two edge in his primary path cannot have any other power rated three or higher.

Your character can even have edges from other paths belonging to the same Virtue as that of his primary path. A Defender can have Avenger and Judge edges, all of which belong to Zeal. However, those other powers still cannot exceed your character's highest rated Defender edge.

Edges are purchased with Virtue points. An edge costs its level in Virtue points. Thus, a level-one edge costs one point of the appropriate Virtue. A level-two edge costs two Virtue points. Getting both the level-one and two edges in the same path therefore costs a total of three Virtue points. Having the level-four edge and all those beneath it in a path costs a total of 10 Virtue points. Remember that you must possess one edge in a path before you can purchase the next higher rated.

Your character's Virtue points can be dedicated to only one edge each. You can't use his 1 Mercy to get the level-one powers from Redeemer, Martyr *and* Innocent. That Virtue point buys only one edge from one of those paths. The same

is true for dedicating multiple Virtue points to acquire higher rated edges. If your character has the level-one Avenger edge and you decide to acquire the level-two power as well, the extra Virtue points needed are dedicated to that new edge; they can't be used to buy any other Zeal powers.

The Edge Costs Chart specifies power costs.

Note that your character's Virtue ratings don't diminish when edges are chosen. A hunter with 3 Mercy isn't reduced to 2 Mercy when he gets the level-one Redeemer edge. Virtues simply record a limit to the edge levels that your character can possess.

Spending "Unused" Virtue Points

You can also take a different approach to acquiring edges with your character's Virtue points, pending Storyteller approval. You don't have to save up Virtue points to buy the next highest edge in a path. You can spend Virtue points as your character gets them to acquire lower level edges in various paths.

If your Redeemer has 2 Mercy and the level-one Redeemer Edge, he doesn't have enough points to get the level-two Redeemer Edge (or any level-two Mercy Edge, for that matter). However, he can spend his second "unused" Mercy point to acquire a level-one power from a different Mercy path, from either Innocent or Martyr.

A Judge with 9 Zeal has the level-three Judgment edge, but doesn't have enough points to gain the level-four (he needs a total of 10 Zeal to have that edge). However, he has never picked up any low-level edges from the other two Zeal paths, and his player decides to do so now. He has three "unused" Zeal points (his first six have been dedicated to his levels one through three Judgment edges). His player spends one Zeal on the level-one Avenger edge, and two more on the level-two Avenger edge.

Buying lower level Edges with "unused" Virtue points comes at a price (isn't there always a price?). The points must now be labeled as "spent." They cannot count toward your character's Virtue total when you try to gain the next edge along a path. The Redeemer in the example above has "spent" his unused second Mercy point. That means it isn't counted when he seeks to gain the level-two Redeemer edge. Rather than need the normal 3 Mercy for that power, he now needs 4 Mercy.

The Judge in the example above has now "spent" his three unused Zeal points. They can't be counted toward getting his level-four Judgment edge. Since Virtues only go to 10, the Judge can never get that level-four power. However, he has two new lower-level edges for his trouble.

To indicate that a Virtue point has been spent on an edge, put a check mark in the "Spent" column of your character sheet, next to the Virtue point in question. This column is an easy means to keeping a record of how you have dedicated your character's Virtue points.

Spending unused Virtue points provides your character with a broad base of edges with which to face the unknown. Access to these various edges may save his life. However, dedicating "unused" Virtue points also keeps your character from attaining the most potent edges in a single path. It's a trade-off: versatility versus focus. Your character can continue to assign "unused" Virtue points to low-level edges that he doesn't already have as long as his character's highest rated edge in his primary path is not exceeded by the level of any other power. That's the limit to which you can broaden your character's scope under any circumstance.

Gaining Virtues and Edges

You get three Virtue points to assign at character creation. More may be acquired during play through risking Conviction (see p. 136). Virtue ratings cannot be increased with experience points (p. 140). Virtues represent your character's goals in the hunt, which he strives for only through the act of hunting itself. Increasing Virtues therefore happens simply by doing, not through any specific study, practice or education. Those kinds of efforts are the realms of experience points, which may be spent to increase your character's more mundane Traits such as Attributes and Abilities.

Because edges are purchased with Virtues, new edges do not manifest in your character unless her Virtues increase sufficiently. See Conviction and Chapter 5 for information on how new edges are gained.

Edge Costs Chart

Level of Edge	Virtue Point Cost per Level	Total Virtue Points Required
One	One	One
Two	Two	Three
Three	Three	Six
Four	Four	Ten
Five	Five	N/A

The Consequences of High Virtues

A character who stalks the horrors of the world and lives to tell the tale is very skilled, very lucky or very powerful — or all three. A hunter devoted to a specific Virtue — one who strictly pursues only one agenda such as destroying the supernatural (Zeal) — eventually attains a high Virtue rating and all the commensurate edges. She may ultimately achieve the limits of what a human being is capable of in the crusade against the night (a Virtue rating of 10). Hunting becomes her obsession, the only meaning to her existence. The hunter literally becomes the hunt itself. Such people are ruthless, headstrong, determined, deadly — and perhaps no longer even human.

Internet rumor has it that only a few people are suspected to have achieved this state in imbued culture's apparently young existence. From what's known or told, these exceedingly rare individuals have sought to push the envelope of what they are capable. Various stories give accounts of their fates: Some hunters supposedly set out to master all aspects of the hunt (in game terms, to fulfill all three Virtues rather than just one). Others say these imbued have gone in search of who or what creates hunters. Still other tales claim that a solitary extremist searches for a means to power that he senses exists but is beyond his reach....

Your character is blessed — or cursed — should he ever achieve the pinnacle of hunter perfection: a Virtue rating of 10. Most die simply trying to make it night to night, protecting family and friends rather than pursuing any selfish, elusive mastery.

For those with nothing else to fight for or any other reason to exist, the limits to imbued potential await in the unknown. However, the ramifications of testing these limits are much more immediate. At 7 Zeal, Vision or Mercy, and for each point gained thereafter, your character gains a derangement automatically (see p. 203).

The Storyteller assigns this quirk, mania or obsession. It should suit your character's identity and the high-rated Virtue in question. Your character begins to abandon his own identity in preference for the hunt itself, becoming almost machinelike in his pursuit of the enemy and his own limits. Loved ones are cast aside. Former values are disregarded. Traditional concerns such as employment, shelter and even food seem inconsequential. You should definitely roleplay your character's derangement and gradual change of identity.

Derangements can be alleviated through roleplaying and Willpower expenditure, at the Storyteller's discretion, but only if some sufficiently traumatizing or moving event occurs that alters your character's course — something that snaps him out of the hunt mentality. Derangements may even be diagnosed and treated by professionals, but persist as long as the hunter continues his crusade. Sometimes, abandoning the hunt completely is the only conscious means by which to retain personal identity and sanity. Yet retirement has its own moral price: How long can an imbued watch monstrosities prey upon the defenseless while he stands idle?

Note that hunters who achieve such abstract heights and who go to such lengths in the war are often misunder-

stood by lessers. Absolute devotees begin to perceive agendas that lowly hunters cannot comprehend. Releasing poison gas to get at corporate shapechangers might seem reasonable to the extremist Judge who seeks "the greater good." A Visionary who begins to recognize patterns in the crusade that are inconceivable to others may demand that his plans be followed, despite the cost in lives and resources. A Martyr who measures sacrifice as the ultimate release from the supernatural may take it upon himself to "sacrifice" the unwilling. These extremists' objectives can simply overstep any limits that most hunters understand.

In a world where the populace at large has no idea of the *truth*, where the authorities are controlled by the enemy, and where hunters bear their burden alone, the imbued must police themselves. Chosen who go too far or who lose perspective can become the targets of their own kind. More than one rogue or extremist has been brought down by his fellows.

Conviction

Your character's inner strength and drive for the hunt is measured in terms of Conviction. This Trait is rated from 1 to 10 and rises and falls quickly as it is risked, spent and regained. All of the imbued have Conviction; it is imparted to them along with Virtues and edges when they are chosen.

Normal people and supernatural creatures do not possess Conviction. Indeed, the Trait can be used only in relation to hunters' edges, to "fuel" those powers with a character's reserves; to resist influence and control by creatures' powers; and to heighten hunter senses to the presence of the supernatural. Your hunter character possesses Willpower, too, but that Trait cannot be applied to gain automatic successes or to accomplish any feat wherein hunter edges are concerned. Such effects are the exclusive functions of Conviction. By contrast, Willpower applies when hunters perform "mundane" actions such as jumping between buildings, lifting heavy objects or staying awake. Conviction has no effect over those efforts that the human body can accomplish all on its own.

Your character has a starting Conviction rating based on his creed. This amount may be increased during character creation through the expenditure of freebie points.

Conviction Changes

When hunters make contact with the supernatural and use their edges, Conviction tends to rise and fall quickly. Keep a careful record of your character's current Conviction score. It could mean the difference between his life and death.

Spending a Conviction point or risking points in an edge roll, as explained below, is considered a reflexive action (see p. 167).

Spending Conviction

Conviction makes it possible for hunters to wage their war. Whereas normal people without the Trait would be driven mad with fear by monsters or would be completely vulnerable to the supernatural, Conviction gives hunters a fighting chance. Spending one Conviction point bestows the following benefits on your character for the duration of the scene.

Note that if no Conviction is spent for your character, he receives none of these benefits and is considered a normal person for the purposes of supernatural effects. That means his mind, emotions and body can be controlled by monsters with such powers. That also means he's oblivious to, stupefied by or terrified by monsters' appearance. The typical result is running in terror, rationalizing away the scene to make some mundane sense of it, or putting events completely out of mind as if they never happened.

Also, spending Conviction to get the following benefits does not interfere with your character's one opportunity per scene to *risk Conviction in an edge-related roll* (see p. 136).

Perception: Your character is able to perceive supernatural entities that might not otherwise be visible to him. Hunters call this ability second sight. Some monstrosities are easy to spot. Shapechangers in horrid man-beast forms are clearly not human. Shambling corpses out to feed on the emotions of hapless victims stand out clear as day — or night. Conviction isn't necessary to recognize the monsters that *any* person could see. However, a Conviction point allows your character to detect the presence of monsters hidden in his vicinity, where he can see naturally. For example, a creature using powers or magic to disguise itself or hide in plain sight becomes visible to your character.

Second sight is also invaluable to the imbued in that it allows them to recognize *all* supernatural creatures as *not human* or *not living* in some way. The entries, below, expand upon this hunter vision, and detail the powers that come with second sight.

- Spirits or ghosts present in the material world appear physical to your character. They may be obviously dead — burned, broken, decayed, wounded or dismembered, or they may look like perfectly ordinary people, but a hunter knows they are not natural. The recently dead are often difficult to distinguish from the living, especially if they bear no obvious deathmarks and wear modern clothes. Yet hunters with second sight recognize an unhealthy pallor, detect the scent of the grave or feel a cold breeze. Although these signs indicate the supernatural, they don't automatically reveal the true nature of the creature. Edges that specifically identify the supernatural may be required to actually recognize a restless spirit for what it is.

Reacting with Conviction

Spending a point of Conviction in a scene helps protect your character from the powers, deceptions and control of monsters. However, it's costly and exhausting for a hunter to expend Conviction every time he enters a new locale or the scene changes. Not even crippling paranoia can sustain your character's Conviction supply when points are spent constantly.

Because stories about hunters who run in fear from the supernatural would be no fun to tell, the Storyteller has the option of allowing characters to use Conviction to *react to* monsters rather than always spending a point at the beginning of each scene. That is, you don't have to spend Conviction for your character to perceive or resist monsters in a scene until the moment of exposure. A glimmering shadow warns your hunter of danger. The lingering smell of the grave suggests the presence of the walking dead. Bizarre, errant thoughts signal mental intrusion by creatures that can manipulate minds. The Storyteller relates the signs of trouble, if any. Whatever the warning or signal, your character may react by using his second sight and defenses to protect himself. For you, that means spending a point of Conviction when trouble is apparent, not knee-jerk with each new room or hour.

To spend Conviction in time to respond to signs of the supernatural, roll Intelligence, Perception or Wits + primary Virtue rating, difficulty 6. The Storyteller decides which Attribute applies to the roll based on the stimulus that warns of trouble — an educated guess (Intelligence), physical indications (Perception) or a simple "danger sense" (Wits). The Storyteller may also replace your character's primary Virtue rating with Alertness, Awareness or Intuition, again depending on what form warning signs take.

The Storyteller even has the option of making a reaction roll *resisted* against a creature's Stealth or against a roll for any power the creature uses in your character's presence. A subtle attempt to influence your character's mind might go completely unnoticed. In some cases, the Storyteller may make "Conviction reaction rolls" on your behalf, in anticipation of a failure or botch, in which case your hunter never realizes that a monster is at work or affects him.

Allowing characters to activate second sight reactively to warning signs, rather than proactively as a constant defense, is up to the Storyteller. It allows players to reserve precious Conviction for when it's really needed, and can add an element of fear and chill to stories. Approving Conviction reactions also allows the Storyteller to introduce creatures without warning characters; a ghost might lurk about the imbued but make no overtures and draw no attention to itself. Characters without active second sight probably don't see or sense the presence unless the Storyteller calls for reaction rolls. Who knows what the spirit can learn about or do to the hunters, just because players want to save their Conviction for when they *think* it's necessary.

If some hunters recognize supernatural danger (their reaction rolls succeed) and others don't (their rolls fail), the Storyteller decides if Conviction can be spent for all. Alert hunters may warn allies. However, supernatural activities may be too isolated, subtle or quick for "slow" hunters to respond. The result may be some imbued who can see and deal with the enemy, while others act like normal humans in monstrous presence — they probably run in fear, stand slack-jawed or become subject to hysteria. Such is the price of trying to preserve Conviction points at the expense of safety.

If "reactive" Conviction is used in a game, all players should know in advance. Characters are still free to activate second sight and related defenses at will (players spend one Conviction each, normally), but reactive rolls do offer some kind of backup.

- Spirits or beings that possess or hide within human hosts appear as images superimposed upon their human victims. Seeing a possessor doesn't immediately allow the hunter to harm the intruder, but he knows it's there.
- Beings that masquerade as humans or that assume human appearance or form register as *not human*. The true (super)nature of the creature is not revealed — that's the purview of edges such as Discern, Witness and Illuminate — but the being comes across as inhuman. Perhaps your hunter gets a chill in the creature's presence, the "person" shimmers strangely, a shadow is cast across it in broad daylight, or a horrific visage momentarily obscures its otherwise human face.

This sense for the inhuman applies even to those creatures that look like ordinary people in every conceivable way. A witch or warlock might be completely mortal and ostensibly indistinguishable from everyday people, yet a hunter with active second sight knows the person is *wrong*. A skinchanger in human form appears unremarkable, but stands out as *unclean* to hunters with second sight.

However, second sight does not explain or reveal *how* these human-seeming beings are "wrong." Edges that distinguish among supernatural beings for what they really are required to know more about a subject.

- Your character is also immune to illusory powers. He can see through artificial hallucinations. Creatures attempting to hide in plain sight are completely obvious. If a creature creates a false image, sound, smell, taste or tactile surface — something that has no substance or is not genuine — it is clearly unreal to your character.

Detecting Fellow Hunters

Second sight does not indicate another imbued as anything other than human, unless the imbued plays his hand. No auras, flashes of power or strange images appear to an imbued looking upon one of his own, unless the subject activates an edge. Likewise, no power — not even Discern, Witness or Illuminate — reveals "inactive" hunters as such; they look perfectly normal to any chosen with these powers. Perhaps the only means by which they might sense each other's presence, that is when not demonstrating edges, is through the Awareness Ability (see p. 106), and even that is at Storyteller discretion, based on the circumstances.

Most hunters insist on their humanity, despite their fantastic capabilities, and point to their "anonymity" to the sight as proof of it. They are not supernatural creatures, only blessed (or condemned) by some higher power, a mutation or by evolution, whatever is appropriate to their beliefs about hunter origins. Other imbued have trouble with such stark contrasts between themselves and their supernatural counterparts, and wonder where the line is really drawn.

The lack of any means to recognize fellow hunters means that the imbued must be proactive in searching for and identifying each other. They must make overtures to achieve contact or they overlook each other amid the defenseless.

Self-Control: Supernaturally imposed fear does not affect your character when you spend a point of Conviction. Horrific scenes of twisted man and creature, poltergeist activity or inexplicable imagery might be frightening, but they do no drive your character away involuntarily or deter his actions in any way.

- Similarly, your character remembers his experiences with horrific creatures when his mind might otherwise shut out memories for sanity's sake. He carries on, but that doesn't mean the lingering images are any less disturbing or haunting.
- Your character is immune to any form of supernatural mind or emotion control. His will cannot be overridden.
- Efforts to control your character's body through force of will alone or to possess it in any way fail automatically.

Lowered Defenses

The protection offered hunters by Conviction allows them to wage their war against the supernatural, to remain above monsters' control and influence. Conviction can't be spent to protect a character all the time, though; points simply run out, and the hunter is left exhausted. Hunters, like all people, also have to sleep, and they're just as vulnerable as everyone else when they do. If a hunter is ever exposed to supernatural mind, emotion or body control while his defenses are down, he is subject to those powers as is any human (unless the Storyteller allows some kind of instinctual spending of Conviction — see the Reacting with Conviction sidebar).

Most influence powers have short-term effects; the creature controls or uses the vulnerable hunter's mind or body for a moment or a few minutes. The effect ends quickly. Other mind- or body-influence powers have long-term effects — they last for hours, days or even weeks. A defenseless hunter affected by one of these powers could suffer supernatural influence for some time. However, if a Conviction point is spent for the character during that period, one of two things can happen, as chosen by the Storyteller: Either the protection offered by Conviction breaks long-term supernatural control, and the hunter has complete self-control thereafter; or the character has complete self-control for the duration of the scene in which Conviction is spent. When that scene ends, the monster's mind or body influence resumes.

Imagine a ghost that climbs into a hunter's body while she sleeps, and that subtly manipulates her waking actions. Perhaps the ghost can even hide its presence for some time. However, when a Conviction point is spent for the character to activate her defenses for whatever reason, the Storyteller decides that the ghost is suddenly ejected from the unwitting host. Imagine her horror!

Now imagine a bloodsucker that implants a suggestion in an unwitting hunter's mind (no Conviction has been spent to protect the character in that scene). The victim is commanded to leak information about fellow hunters via email, over a period of several days. During that time, a point of Conviction is spent for the character to activate second sight and protection against another monster. The Storyteller decides that the infusion of energy keeps the character from revealing secrets for that scene. However, he resumes selling out his friends afterward.

The Storyteller also has the option of alerting hunters to any unwitting supernatural influence when a Conviction point is spent. The sudden realization allows a character to get help or seek to free himself, even if outside control will resume when the current Conviction point "wears off."

Consider the mole in the example above. He's been blindly revealing information about his hunter allies when a point of Conviction is spent for him to deal with an unrelated creature. The Storyteller decides in the moment of clarity that the hunter recognizes his indiscretions of the past few days. Horrified, he realizes he's under supernatural control but can't shake the enthrallment. Conviction can keep being spent to protect him, but the character's pool dries up eventually. He may also turn to fellow hunters for help, but will still seek to leak information when his Conviction runs out. Perhaps hunter allies have to lock up the character for his — and their — own good. Maybe they go in search of the character's tormentor, and must leave the victimized hunter behind as a potential liability.

The Storyteller has complete freedom to decide how supernatural control or influence powers — especially long-term ones — interact with hunter's Conviction defenses. You should certainly obey the guidelines of the opposing effects, but should err on the side of your story whenever in doubt. If a cool turn of events — and a traumatic revelation — comes from a clash of, say, mind control and Conviction use, run with it as long as the players have fun with the game.

Storyteller Prerogative

Spending a point of Conviction to give a hunter second sight and protection against mental, emotional and bodily influence is a pretty potent defense against the supernatural. When hunters go up against lowly vampires, newly risen zombies, recently dead ghosts or novice warlocks, that protection is fair and gives the imbued a fighting chance. However, should an initiate hunter be able to stand up to an ancient vampire — a veritable force of supernature — and automatically resist its mind-control attempts just because a point of Conviction is spent? Probably not.

Such scenarios are the very reason the Storyteller has control over how effective second sight and its related protection really is. Sure, second sight *should* reveal monsters as inhuman. Sure, hunters' resilience *should* protect them against ghosts' possession or emotion-control attempts. But should the imbued *always* be immune, even against an ages-old foe? That's for the Storyteller to decide. He has the authority to test the efficacy of second sight and hunter self-control. If a lowly hunter faces a mighty zombie master, the Storyteller can call for a *primary* Virtue roll. That is, the player rolls his character's primary Virtue rating against a difficulty set by the Storyteller (6 for a rather powerful enemy; perhaps 8 for a titanic one). The Storyteller may even make this roll on players' behalf if he doesn't want to alert characters to trouble in case rolls fail or botch.

If the roll succeeds, the hunter is able to perceive the inhumanity of the creature in question. His mental and bodily protections also function; the benefits of spending a point of Conviction apply as normal.

Spending Willpower should not provide an automatic success in Virtue rolls. Willpower is the province of the character's mortal, human side, not his otherworldly, imbued aspect.

If a Virtue roll fails, the hunter does not have what it takes to perceive the ancient evil as a danger. The potent creature can hide in plain sight, right before the hunter's eyes. It may also impose its will upon his thoughts, emotions and body. The hunter is the equivalent of a normal, mortal human before that supernatural foe.

After a failed roll, it's up to the Storyteller to decide whether subsequent primary Virtue rolls can be made to see a formidable opponent or to resist its control. Perhaps such a villain's initial effort to affect a hunter likewise fails. Now that the imbued is aware of the danger he's in, the Storyteller allows another Virtue roll (maybe at a higher difficulty than before). Or failing a Virtue roll says it all for a hunter's chance of defying that awesome enemy; the creature can have its way with the character for the remainder of the scene.

Note that failing a primary Virtue roll to resist a single daunting opponent doesn't make the hunter vulnerable to *all* monsters in the same scene, just the powerful one. Furthermore, the Discern, Witness and Illuminate edges could allow a hunter to see a powerful monster — even when second sight does not — but the hunter is still exposed to its mental, emotional and bodily influence.

If a hunter's Virtue roll against a fierce creature botches, any number of effects could take place. The character is essentially helpless against the abomination's powers. Reduce the difficulties of the creature's actions against the character. Increase the character's edge difficulties against all supernatural beings for the remainder of the scene. Or deny the character any investiture of Conviction points into any edges used against the imposing creature (if any can be used against it at all).

Failing or botching a Virtue roll against an ancient creature applies to that scene only. A hunter isn't vulnerable to that creature for all time thereafter (unless a botch is really severe...). Next scene, if a successful Virtue roll is made, a hunter could perceive and protect himself against the being as he could any other, lesser monster.

One of the repercussions of primary Virtue rolls is that some hunters in a group are able to contend with a potent enemy, whereas others cannot. Allies can tell a "blind" hunter where the enemy figure is, but he may not be able to see it or see it as anything but human, and he is completely prone to any control powers it possesses. Imbued can therefore be turned against imbued. Helpless hunters may have to be protected by their allies. Such is the fate of the chosen who plunge into the depths of the World of Darkness to meet its most heinous denizens. The Storyteller may even *want* players and characters to learn that some evils are more than even the imbued can face.

Are there any other instances in which second sight and self-control can fail a hunter? That depends on the drama that the Storyteller wants to create. When characters go hunting for the first time, the Storyteller may require primary Virtue rolls for characters to perceive or resist *any* kind of monster. First forays against the supernatural are dangerous due to hunters' lack of experience. The Storyteller could also call for such a roll under traumatizing circumstances. If a hunter is suddenly confronted by his daughter-turned-bloodsucker, he may not be able to resist her powers. Dramatic impact should dictate when even these innate hunter defenses and abilities could fail.

Activating Edges

Conviction can also be spent point by point to activate or power certain edges, usually potent ones. Chapter 5 describes the edges that make such demands. This expenditure does not count as your character's one opportunity per scene to risk Conviction in an edge-related roll (see below). Indeed, your character might activate an edge that requires a Conviction expenditure, *and* he might risk further Conviction points in a die roll made with that same edge.

Risking Conviction

Conviction points can be gambled to achieve increased success when using edges. Your character literally invests his wherewithal for the hunt into an edge. The effort can reap fantastic rewards as his hunter power becomes amazingly potent and his desire to continue on against the unknown is bolstered. However, investing Conviction can also exhaust your character if his effort fails, leaving him drained and vulnerable. The results are even more devastating on a botched roll.

All hunters appear to possess this capacity; the chance to put everything into one focused "punch." Hunters speculate about where this ability comes from and why they're able to do it. Ultimately, they're left as baffled by it as they are by the imbuing itself. Hunters simply realize instinctively that they have potential energy to spare in the fight against the supernatural. The wise and deliberate learn when to reserve that power — and when to unleash it.

Once per scene, you can invest any or all of your character's current Conviction points into a single roll related to an edge. These points cannot be divided up into separate rolls; they can be applied to only one. Each point risked adds one die to your edge dice pool. The resultant pool increases your character's chance for success in the action.

Your Avenger might use Cleave against a disembodied spirit, and you can invest Conviction points to add extra dice to a single attack roll. The Conviction dice are simply added to his normal Dexterity + Melee pool for the attack. Any successes gained are in turn applied to damage. Your Redeemer could cry out "No!" as a speeding car bears down on her, and she averts catastrophe. You can invest Conviction points to add dice to your Bluster roll — Wits + Mercy — and escape harm by causing the vehicle to careen around your character. Or you can invest Conviction points in a Ward roll, increasing the number of dice rolled to determine if your Defender can keep monsters at bay. Rolls made with edges are explained under the power descriptions themselves in Chapter 5.

The Storyteller has final say about what kinds of rolls apply to edges and what kinds do not. As a rule of thumb, any roll made to perform a mundane action — something a normal person could do — is not eligible for Conviction bonus dice. Conviction cannot help your character swim for shore, but it can help her escape the notice of a monster through the Hide edge, for example.

Note that investing Conviction does not award an automatic success as spending Willpower does. There are no automatic successes where bizarre powers and fighting creatures of the night are concerned. Rather, risking Conviction improves your character's chances of success through the simple odds of rolling more dice. A very good roll can be far more rewarding than any automatic success gained through Willpower would be. A very bad roll can be disastrous. Ultimately, your hunter is on his own, whether his action has the desired result or not.

Successful Gambles

Success or failure in a bolstered edge roll determines whether your character gains or loses Conviction. If the boosted dice pool results in a success, no matter how marginal or resounding, your character retains any of the Conviction you invested, *and* he gains an extra point. Record his new Conviction score on your sheet. Your character's commitment to the hunt is tested and he proves worthy. His confidence to continue fighting is affirmed and he has more energy to do so.

If Conviction points are invested in a resisted roll against an enemy, your character must win the contest to regain his Conviction and to win an extra point. Generally speaking, use of an edge must have a result or impact to gain Conviction points from the effort. Achieving successes in an edge roll, but accomplishing nothing with the effort — such as investing Conviction in a Witness roll, but perceiving nothing supernatural in a locale — garners no Conviction points. The effort is considered a failure. (Storytellers, the need to *accomplish something* with an invested roll keeps players from abusing Conviction constantly, trying to increase it gratuitously.)

Depending on the drama or gravity of a situation in which a Conviction gamble succeeds, the Storyteller has the option of awarding more than one Conviction point. If your Innocent character dares use Hide to enter a vampire lord's lair and spy on the ancient creature, the Storyteller may award you two or three bonus points for a successful Conviction investment. If your Redeemer desperately needs proof of a monster's buried humanity — before encroaching Zealots destroy the creature — the Storyteller may award you two or three points when Conviction is risked in a successful Insinuate roll. Or your Visionary character might have tentatively convinced his fellow hunters that he knows the key to defeating a zombie master, and it means running *unarmed* through a gauntlet of shamblers. Your character must anticipate every danger that could arise to maintain his allies' trust, so he triggers Foresee. Under these circumstances, the Storyteller might award two or three points upon a successful Conviction gamble.

Awarding extra Conviction points is not based on the number of successes achieved on an invested edge roll. The roll may be marginal (one success) or remarkable (four or more successes). The significance of circumstances themselves determines whether bonus Conviction is gained. Even a well-roleplayed turn of events, in which Conviction is gambled on a edge roll, may award you bonus points. You may petition for extra Conviction after a gamble, and must explain why you should get it, but the Storyteller has final say.

No more than three points should ever be awarded for any successful Conviction investment. Indeed, a character should put aside his own life for the cause, another person or being, or should change the course of his very existence to win three points.

Failed Gambles

If a boosted edge dice pool fails — no successes are rolled — your character loses all of the Conviction points that you invested in the roll. Record his diminished Conviction score. He loses spirit for the fight, and the reserves with which he may continue on against the supernatural dwindle.

It's dangerous to risk *all* of your character's Conviction points in a single roll. If it fails, he literally has no "fire" left to deploy against the enemy. Likewise, he has no Conviction left with which to perceive monstrosities, to protect his own will or to activate some edges (as accomplished by *spending* Conviction points, above). A hunter with 0 Conviction is practically a normal human, vulnerable to whatever the night holds.

Catastrophic Gambles

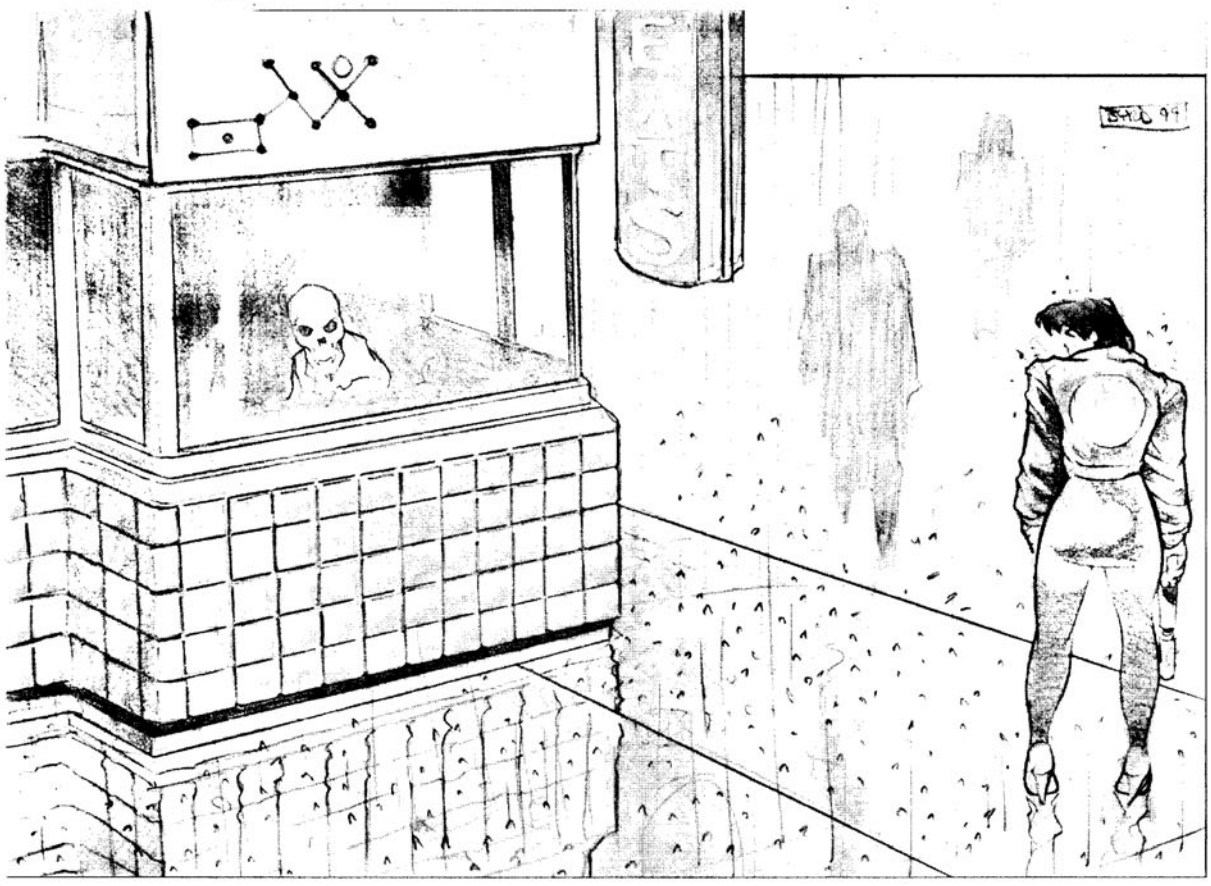
Botching an edge roll in which Conviction has been invested is disastrous. Superficially, the effect seems innocuous enough; no critical errors, blunders or mishaps occur when a Conviction-invested roll botches (unless the Storyteller wants them to). The hunter internalizes the catastrophe, instead. Your character loses all of his current Conviction. The fuel for his resilience and powers is lost temporarily, as described above for risking and losing all Conviction.

The instantaneous loss of all Conviction is devastating. It's a step backward along your character's path as a hunter. In roleplaying terms, his goal in the war may suddenly seem hollow, obscure or futile. His efforts and accomplishments thus far seem for naught — after all, don't the creatures just keep coming? Just as you give meaning to the scores on your sheet during character creation, complete loss of Conviction should have meaning, too. Your character doesn't just pick himself up, brush himself off and keep fighting; he suffers a setback that must be overcome if he is to continue or survive (see Regaining Conviction, below).

Storytellers should encourage players to roleplay such a downturn. Being utterly human — powerless and defenseless — is a bleak reminder of how far a hunter has fallen when monstrous beings close in.

Regaining and Losing Conviction

The most common way to regain Conviction is to invest it in an edge roll and succeed at the action — the points risked are kept and one or more is gained. Conviction can be



Conviction and Conventional Successes or Failures

Note that succeeding, failing or botching an edge roll in which no Conviction is risked has no extraordinary consequences. The action takes effect, does not or blunders normally. No Conviction points are gained or lost if you haven't risked Conviction in an edge dice pool.

risked only once per scene, though, so there are limits to what points can be recouped or increased in this way.

Conviction is meant to be reserved for desperate times, as a hold-out weapon or defense against the supernatural. Don't risk it in an edge roll every scene, whether monsters are around or not, just because you want to gain more Conviction. That's just a cheap way to power-up your character. The Storyteller is free to deny any Conviction investment that he feels is gratuitous or unjustified.

Besides, there are other, better, in-character means of increasing Conviction:

• Your character's starting Conviction is listed in his creed description. If his Conviction rating ever drops below that level in a story, it returns to *starting* level at the beginning of the next story (or even game session if the Storyteller is generous). The Storyteller may limit this increase if your character has been sufficiently traumatized or demoralized recently on the hunt. A crippling setback can paralyze your character for some time. A long period of inactivity against the supernatural can also limit your character's starting Conviction before a new story.

Alternatively, the Storyteller may raise your character's Conviction rating to his starting level at the beginning of a new *scene* rather than story. This increase represents a drastic change in your character's spirit and drive, so it should be justified in terms of events. Perhaps your character accomplishes a significant feat in keeping with his hunter agenda or primary Virtue — and he does so by mundane means, without the use of edges. Maybe having very low or no Conviction reminds your character of human fragility, and that empathy reinvigorates his passion for the hunt. Or, although heavy handed, perhaps the Heralds are not yet ready to sacrifice their soldier, and they bolster his Conviction.

(Note: During character creation, you may have spent freebie points to raise your character's starting Conviction above normal for his creed. His score does not revert to that inflated rate when a new story or scene begins, it returns to

the normal starting level for his creed. Conviction acquired with freebie points is a one-time purchase.)

• If your character performs an amazing feat against a night-creature or uses an edge in an inventive way, he may regain a point of Conviction at the Storyteller's discretion. Cleave can be used to swing away at nightstalkers all night, but using it to set drapes ablaze and drive the creatures off is potentially far more meritorious. Such awards should not be granted to a character more than once in a game session.

• Your character's Virtues indicate his goals in the hunt — whether to destroy the supernatural, to learn the hunt's ultimate purpose or to understand the enemy. Your character's creed gives him direction and context in the hunt — the approach he should take to fulfill the dictates of his Virtues; perhaps to defend, redeem or envision all-new possibilities.

Your character may gain a Conviction point when he exemplifies or fulfills his creed in a dramatic way. It's one thing to be a violent Avenger. It's another to personally challenge five zombies at one time and live to tell the tale. A Martyr can always put himself in harm's way, but when he risks his very life to find the decency within a monster, he goes above and beyond the call of duty. The Storyteller decides if a worthy feat is performed, but he should not award more than one point to a character this way per game session.

• Your character may gain a point of Conviction if she convinces a hunter of another creed to pursue the purpose of her own. The other hunter(s) must be set on a different course of action, but your character convinces him of the superiority of her personal agenda under those circumstances. A Visionary might convince an Avenger and Judge to spare the enemy to understand what its ultimate intent is. An Innocent might convince a Redeemer that a mindless apparition isn't hurting anyone and doesn't need to be "saved" from anything. Other hunters usually have to defy or ignore the tenets of their own creeds to follow your character for her to gain Conviction in this way. The Storyteller decides when this happens and shouldn't award more than one point to a character by this means in the same game session.

• (Optional) The Storyteller may *take one or more Conviction points away* from your character if she decides that your hunter strays drastically from his creed. A Visionary whose first resort is consistently violence, rather than getting to the root of a problem, isn't very insightful. An Innocent who stands idly by while the defenseless or pure are corrupted pays only lip service to sanctity. Such abuses are worthy of punishment, and loss of Conviction points makes an in-game statement.

The Storyteller ultimately should use her story as the barometer for the rate at which Conviction is regained (or taken away). If characters get their asses kicked repeatedly, despite planning and prudent action, maybe they deserve more Conviction. Likewise, if the dice are simply against the characters and Conviction is lost fast and furious, extra points might be regained simply by virtue of their persistence. After all, Conviction can mean the difference between life and death for hunters.

The Storyteller can also be absolutely stingy with Conviction if characters win it hand over fist through their own actions. The general rule is: Help players have fun and respect the needs of the story. Don't ruin the players' good time by spoiling or shirking them, and don't abandon the mood or theme of the story by being too generous or too frugal.

Maxing Out

Conviction is rated 1 to 10. What happens when your character reaches 10 Conviction? He become stronger. You may cash those Conviction points in for an extra Virtue point of your choice. Whether Zeal, Vision or Mercy, it doesn't matter. However, you must observe the limit set by your character's primary Virtue: His other Virtue ratings cannot exceed his primary Virtue score (although they can match it).

This extra Virtue point is gained immediately, not at the end of the current story. You can add the point to any Virtue, but you should make the choice in keeping with your character's identity, self-chosen mission, the events that led up to the bonus or simply in relation to the current story. Gaining a new Virtue point is like assigning any Trait to your persona during character creation; his scores should have meaning.

Your character might be low on Mercy, and you've been eyeing the level-two Martyr edge, but he maxes out Conviction and gains an extra Virtue point while in a rage against shapechanging murderers. Does it really make sense that he gains Mercy? A staunch Defender can always use more points in Zeal, but if he maxes out Conviction while trying to learn a bloodsucker's origin, he might gain a point of Vision, instead.

The Storyteller might even restrict which Virtue increases. If the mood of his story is self-sacrifice, and Storyteller characters have been giving of themselves all story long, he might require that you take a point of Mercy, not Zeal.

It's also possible to hold onto your character's 10 Conviction, opting to not cash it in right away. He might need all the Conviction he can get in an impending confrontation with a zombie lord. Once at 10, your character gains no more Conviction; any that would normally be won through risked rolls or exemplary actions are wasted. However, you have potential access to a large number of extra dice when making edge rolls. The danger is failing such a roll and losing any Conviction risked, or botching and losing all 10 of your character's current Conviction. In either case, your character gains no extra Virtue point. That's the risk you take for riding the high of your character's enthusiasm for the hunt. He may crash and burn just as emphatically.

You can also *spend* any Conviction while your character has a rating of 10, perhaps to activate a specific edge or to utilize second sight. Your character's Conviction score drops appropriately, so you can't trade in and can't gain more Virtues till his Conviction score returns to 10, at which time you can cash it in.

When you turn in your 10 Conviction, your character returns to his starting Conviction rating, based on his creed. If you spent freebie points to increase starting Conviction during character creation, your character does not resume that inflated level now. He has the standard starting Conviction rating for his creed. Your character then begins to gain or lose Conviction all over again and may max out once more if he's lucky — and survives.

Gaining Virtue points means your character may be eligible for new edges. He must have enough Virtue points to afford a new power: 1 for a level-one edge, a total of 3 to achieve a level-two, a total of 6 for a level-three or a total of 10 for a level-four power. Or, you can simply spend the point to acquire a low-level edge from any of the creed paths under the Virtue in question. Your character might now have 2 Zeal — not enough to afford a level-two Zeal edge, but enough to acquire another level-one edge from the Avenger, Defender or Judge paths that your character doesn't already have. (Be sure to earmark that new Zeal point as "spent"; it cannot be counted toward your character's Virtue score when he wants to gain his next highest edge. If you later want a level-two Zeal edge, your character must have 4 Zeal, not 3.)

Manifesting new edges in-game is discussed in Chapters 5 and 8.

Health

The Health Trait is often called upon in the life of your hunter. In their struggle against unknown forces, the imbued are injured and lose health levels, then regain them when they heal. The Health Trait comprises seven different levels of injury, from Bruised to Incapacitated, with different dice-pool penalties applicable to each. If your character is Injured, subtract one die from his pools. If your character is Crippled, subtract five dice from his pools. If these penalties leave a character with no dice in a given dice pool, he cannot perform that action. However, your hunter may summon up his reserves; you may spend a point of Willpower to ignore wound penalties for one action. A character at Incapacitated is left effectively semi-conscious by his injuries and can only observe his surroundings or whisper to another character.

Remember that wound penalties apply to hunters' conscious actions only. Purely reflexive, unconscious activities — soaking, Willpower rolls or using Conviction — and their dice pools, if any, are unaffected. The Storyteller ultimately decides whether a roll is governed by injury penalties in certain cases — the damage dice pool from a punch may be reduced, but the damage pool from a firearm might not be.

Experience

The period following the imbuing is rife with horrific revelations, burdensome awareness and soul-wrenching revulsion. Your character must come to grips with how things really are, the dangers that lurk around every corner, and with her own freakish identity. If she can contend with all of this trauma, she may have what it takes to become a hunter. Probably the most humbling lesson she learns in her initial foray is that she knows and can do so very little. If she wants to survive this world and protect the things she cares for, she must study, learn and improve — expand upon the capabilities she already has and start from scratch with others. Knowing how to drive is one thing; learning how to load and fire heavy weaponry is another.

Such development is measured with experience points, a reward system for lessons learned and abilities honed. The Storyteller awards experience points to your character at the end of each chapter or story. You may either spend these points immediately to increase or acquire Traits, or save them up for large expenditures. Keep a record of your character's current experience score on her character sheet.

Experience points may be spent to increase existing Attributes and Abilities, and to gain new Abilities. The costs for these Traits are on p. 141, but keep in mind that no Trait can be increased by more than one point in the aftermath of a single story. Drastic changes take time.

Your character has Backgrounds from the start, from before being imbued. They may not be increased with expe-

Health Chart

Health Level	Dice Pool Penalty	Movement Penalty
Bruised		Slightly battered; your character suffers no movement or dice-pool penalties.
Hurt	-1	Superficially hurt; your character suffers no movement penalties.
Injured	-1	Hurt; your character's movement is impaired slightly (halve maximum running speed).
Wounded	-2	Significantly hurt; your character may not run, though he may still walk or jog.
Mauled	-2	Badly hurt; your character may hobble no more than three yards per turn.
Crippled	-5	Extremely hurt; your character may crawl no more than one yard per turn.
Incapacitated		Direly hurt; possibly unconscious; your character may do nothing and may take no actions. If unconscious, only certain reflexives such as soak may be attempted.
Dead		What more is there to say? What will your next character be like?

rience points. They may, however, change through the course of the chronicle as your character makes and loses friends, vies for power or acquires new assets. The Storyteller should always take into account how a character's Backgrounds may change over time, based on what happens from story to story.

Virtues, Conviction and edges cannot be increased, improved upon or learned with experience points, either. They are the mystifying province of the hunt itself, a condition of being imbued that is beyond even hunters' direct will.

The Storyteller always arbitrates how many experience points are awarded and which Traits may be raised or purchased. The Traits you improve should be based on the story just told and your character's behavior in it. If your character interrogated a reporter, you could improve or acquire Intimidation. If your character has been working out or performed an impressive feat of strength, her Strength Attribute could be increased. However, a character who shoots first and asks questions later probably shouldn't expect to learn much in the way of Subterfuge or Empathy. Successful attempts at an action aren't the only way to get better at an activity, either. Failed efforts teach as much, if not more.

Players should be able to mold their characters into desired images. It's the Storyteller's duty to help achieve this. Part of that duty is to insist that players roleplay their characters with the intent of improving specified Traits. The Storyteller should always ask what characters learned in a story, and whether players' proposed experience point allocations reflect that development.

New Traits

Just as in real life, acquisition of new capacities takes time and dedication. A character who hopes to learn a new Ability must spend time learning and practicing, in addition to any experience point requirement. Sometimes, the study is simple (learning the basics of driving a car takes a day or two). Sometimes it's complex (Japanese takes months of concentrated effort to speak marginally well). The time and effort that a Trait requires should always be invested before it can be learned. In other words: Storytellers, don't let characters manifest new Traits spontaneously!

Awarding Experience Points

At the end of each chapter (game session), the Storyteller should award each player between one and five experience points. The Storyteller should exercise caution that she doesn't award too many points, making the characters advance too quickly. Yet she shouldn't be stingy, either. Experience points should be awarded fairly, but characters who take more risks and are more useful to the group should receive more for their enhanced experiences. Use the following guidelines for experience-point distribution.

One Point — Automatic: Each character gets one point at the end of each chapter, simply from experiencing the events.

One Point — Learning Curve: Ask the player what his character learned in the course of the session's events. If you agree with the answer, award the character one experience point.

One Point — Roleplaying: The player carried out the role of her character well, not only entertainingly but appropriately. The player performed as the character would have in those circumstances. Truly inspired roleplaying might merit two experience points, but this should be a glorious exception, not the rule.

One Point — Heroism: Hunters often face life-threatening situations and risk their lives to let total strangers escape certain death. If a character acts heroically and manages to survive, he should be rewarded. Beware of Martyr characters who take advantage of this rule; stupidity and suicidal behavior should not be mistaken for heroism.

The End of the Story

The Storyteller might also decide to give extra experience points at the end of a story, if the players have done their part and the characters have faced substantial trials. Only a few points should be awarded at this time, as they are effectively "bonus points" for a job well done.

One Point — Success: The characters achieved all or part of the goals they set out to accomplish. Even minor victories can be rewarded if they pushed the story forward.

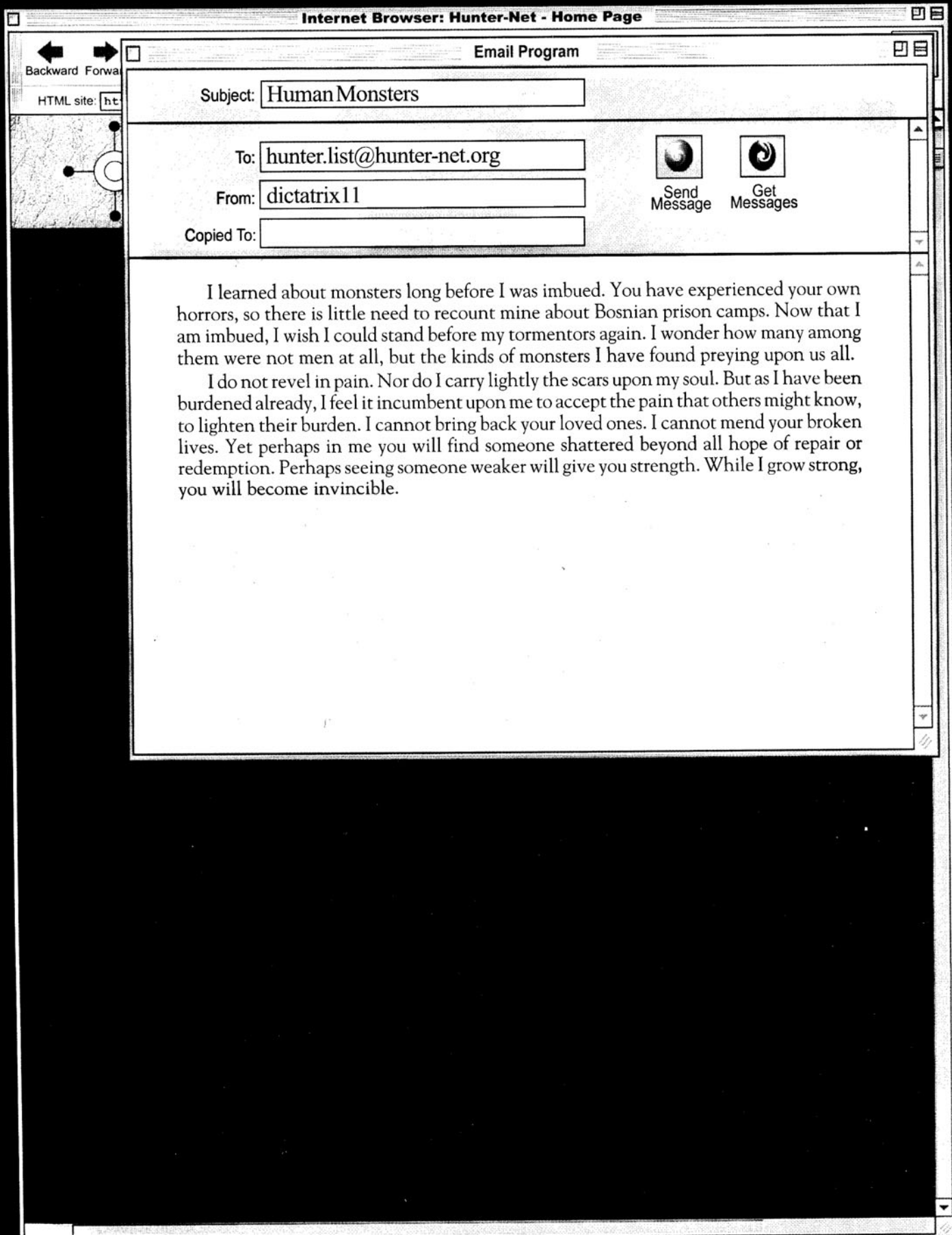
One Point — Danger: The characters survived against harsh odds and mortal peril.

One Point — Wisdom: A player — and thus his character — came up with a brilliant plan or a spontaneous strategy that enabled the group to succeed when it would likely have failed otherwise.

More points can be awarded if you decide they should be, or if you want the characters to advance more quickly than they currently do.

Experience Costs

Trait	Cost
New Ability	3
Attribute	current rating x 4
Ability	current rating x 2
Willpower	current rating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Get Messages
I learned about monsters long before I was imbued. You have experienced your own horrors, so there is little need to recount mine about Bosnian prison camps. Now that I am imbued, I wish I could stand before my tormentors again. I wonder how many among them were not men at all, but the kinds of monsters I have found preying upon us all.
I do not revel in pain. Nor do I carry lightly the scars upon my soul. But as I have been burdened already, I feel it incumbent upon me to accept the pain that others might know, to lighten their burden. I cannot bring back your loved ones. I cannot mend your broken lives. Yet perhaps in me you will find someone shattered beyond all hope of repair or redemption. Perhaps seeing someone weaker will give you strength. While I grow strong, you will become invincible.

CHAPTER 5: THE HUNTER'S EDGE (POWERS)

For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

— Hebrews 9:26

Edges are the bizarre and amazing capabilities granted to (or imposed upon) hunters when they are imbued. Although most hunters consider themselves to still be human, the unnatural existence of their powers makes some wonder if they're even people anymore. After all, what separates a corpse that rises from the grave; a being that can literally transform into an animal; and an individual obsessed with stalking monsters, someone who wields freakish, incredible weapons and who can heal himself instantaneously? That just isn't normal — or perhaps not even human!

Dialogue on the few hunter forums such as hunter-net goes this way and that about the source of edges — a term coined by the people looking for sense and meaning in the powers they possess. Everyone and no one has an answer. Some point to "logical" explanations such as diseases, unlikely fluctuations in the ozone layer or radioactive fallout from secret government experiments. Others look beyond this world for explanations: in a deity, aliens, the Devil or simply in the end of the world. Ultimately, the source of and reason for edges can never be known until the imbuing itself — and who or what is behind it — is understood.

The bottom line is: Your character suddenly has unbelievable powers. The moment he discovers them, the most appalling abomination imaginable appears before him. Everything else seems to come naturally.

Initial Edges

Your character's edges are assigned at character creation. Depending on the Storyteller's plan for the chronicle, she may let you choose your character's edges in advance, as part and parcel of your Virtues and creed. Or the Storyteller may ask you to create an absolutely normal person. He stays that way only until life as he knows it comes to an end in the prelude. That's when the fireworks begin.

In the latter case, the Storyteller may assign your character an initial edge once she knows how your character responds to the supernatural. A violent reaction may empower him with a weapon. A scheming reaction may grant him a stealthy power. A compassionate response may bestow a healing ability. Your character might not even realize that he wields or utilizes the power until the moment of truth (the prelude) is over. It's almost as if a divine hand reaches down and reveals to your character a gift that he always had. He simply never knew he had it.

A character created wholly before play begins has a similar experience: A power manifests spontaneously during the prelude and helps the character fulfill the foremost goal that he sets out to accomplish in the presence of *evil*.

After the prelude, no matter the approach to character design, the rest of your character's starting edges manifest. They appear through accidents, experimentation, conscious effort to make *something happen*, seemingly spontaneous events or during subsequent encounters with the unknown. Your character might be at work, trying desperately to hold his life and sanity together — when one of *them* walks past his office. Suddenly your character's computer shorts out or his desk drawers open and shut by themselves in response to your character's anger or anxiety; your character now knows that there are *more* of *them* — and that he can do more, too.

All these events are ones that the Storyteller can arrange with you as your character explores his own capabilities. You may plot your own edge discoveries or may ask the Storyteller to run events that you may react to realistically. Perhaps a short sit-down after the prelude, but before the first true game session, allows your character to manifest, use and control his powers. Or maybe the Storyteller wants your character to enter the first game session inexperienced with his powers or unaware of their full extent. That would be one eye-opening night of roleplaying. Ultimately, taking control of your character's edges is fundamental to his surviving the hunt, and it should be accounted for in the story.

Gaining More Edges

Only a few powers are bestowed to your character when he is imbued. The full extent of his capabilities may be explored in, say, the first week after his introduction to the true World of Darkness. Yet, as your character ventures out night after night, he may gain more Virtue points and therefore more edges.

The Storyteller has a choice in how to handle the emergence of new powers. She can let you choose your character's new edge. Or she can choose it for you based on your character's identity and the course of the chronicle, but withhold knowledge of the power from you until a dramatic moment for it to manifest. The second approach is more in keeping with the hunter experience: Your character never asked for this world or existence, and yet it's foisted upon him — and now other powers are, too.

Regardless of how new edges are acquired, they all appear in the same basic way. Your character undertakes his frightening calling when he suddenly does something that he's never been capable of before. The moment harks back to your character's prelude, and you may roleplay a flashback of sorts to that scene. Perhaps old fears wash over your character, or he feels infused with the same energy and drive to accomplish the seemingly impossible.

Inexplicably, your character has a new power, from who knows where or what. Apparently, the Messengers have played their hand in your character's life yet again. Now that he's demonstrated a new edge, it's time to understand the effect — its trigger, capabilities and limits. Learning to control the new edge can be accomplished as discussed for initial edges, above, and should be detailed in the chronicle, whether with a, "You spend a week understanding the subtleties of your new power," or "You must seek out a fellow hunter who also wields this power. The search could take days or weeks — and then you have to convince your intended teacher to train you." The quest to control edges can develop into a story itself, especially for high-powered ones (levels four and up) that are extremely intricate.

Edge Appearances

Hunters who doubt their own humanity base their concerns on who can see edges in use and who cannot. Your character can see the effects of his powers — a bright light emanating from his fist, a gray fog billowing from his mouth, his wounds closing right before his eyes. Hunters can see and understand each other's powers in action, too. The same is true for all the supernatural creatures that hunters oppose. They, too, see the lights, fog and amazing healing. If a Conviction point is spent for your character (see Conviction, p. 132), he can see supernaturals in all their glory — those hiding in plain sight, the horrific man-beast that sanity tells him to flee, and the spirits hiding within human shells. So again the question: How are hunters really any different from the things they fight?

Normal, everyday people cannot see edges at work. Their minds apparently cannot fathom the events that occur before them, and so they find rationales for the things that happen. Humans see no blades of light, foggy breath or regeneration. They perceive images that their sheltered minds can handle: "That man has a flashlight." "Is there some kind of stage show going on?" "That blood is fake." Ironically, these are the very things your character used to say of such spectacles before the scales fell from his eyes.

The Storyteller explains how normal people interpret hunter powers, if it's necessary at all. Typically, when a fight breaks out, people scatter (although the police may be along shortly). All manner of stories spring up to explain a struggle, half of them complete fabrications. Strangely, similar ac-

counts often occur when supernaturals make appearances or use their powers publicly. Ordinary people misunderstand many of the monsters they see, too.

Although mundane people fail to truly understand hunter and supernatural powers at work, the imbued do not have *carte blanche* when it comes to using edges publicly. Cutting off a head is still cutting of a head, no matter how it's accomplished. People can often see the *fallout* of hunter and supernatural activities, if not the activities themselves. Lingering around the scene of a commotion or criminal act therefore makes your character a prime suspect. Willful, insane or drunk people may decide to deal with your character, even if they don't fully understand what's happened. And then there are those sirens again....

The Storyteller should keep your character on his toes when it comes to using edges before an audience. Attracting attention is often an invitation to a waiting grave for a hunter; the enemy and its hidden pawns tend to notice bizarre public events and their perpetrators. If your character gets cocky or sloppy, he can expect an unwelcome stalker of his own, if not a night in lockup or a full-fledged jail sentence.

Triggers

No two hunters activate their edges in the same way, even if they seem to have the same powers. Some people need to get sufficiently angry to manifest desired edges. Some think back to the moment they were imbued and call upon those same emotions to summon the edges they need. Others learn to trigger their powers by saying certain phrases — a trademark of sorts. Hunters who wrestle morally with their powers may need some prop, such as a religious icon, to activate edges — items through which powers are used.

Your character should have his own triggering mechanisms. He may have one that grants access to any edge he possesses. Each power may have its own unique trigger. Means of calling upon powers may not develop until your character has had a few encounters with the unknown. Or triggers might come to him naturally from the very beginning.

No matter the form of your character's trigger(s), its style should be consistent with the persona you've created. A religious hunter might simply ask, "God, please help me." A determined Avenger might goad his opponents into attacking first to make him sufficiently mad: "Oh, yeah! That's the stuff I'm looking for!" An uncertain Innocent might hold out an object, probably unassuming, as the conduit through which his powers take effect: "Please don't make me do this!" The choice of triggers is yours, but make sure it suits your character's identity.

Please Don't!

Hunter: The Reckoning is about normal people confronted with a hellish world populated by demons and absolutely ignorant human cattle. Awareness of this reality is mind-numbingly oppressive. Your character can't turn to anyone but his own meager kind for support, but he must save everyone he cares for, none of whom understand him or even think him sane. No wonder so many hunters are borderline suicidal.

All that said, this is not a game about superheroes. No one dives into evil hordes head first and emerges unscathed. Even if your character is lucky enough to avoid physical scars, he can't escape the emotional or mental ones.

When you create and roleplay your **Hunter** character, ask yourself how you would deal with his burden. If your sister died — you attended her funeral, saw her interred — how would you react if she showed up at your door, disheveled, nails hideously long and ichor spewing from her mouth? Would you leap about, shout four-color platitudes and blast away? You'd shit your pants. And if and when you finally forced yourself to accept that your sister is dead, but at large, you might set out to face her: the most courageous and insane thing you've ever done. That's the kind of reality your hunter character deals with day and night. Try to be true to it.

Edge Names

The following are descriptions of the powers available to hunters. They are presented in terms of Virtues and then creed paths: Mercy, Vision and then Zeal, with edge paths detailed under each.

All powers are named here, but remember that hunters give their edges different names. "Cleave" can be called anything from "Louisville" to "the Hand of God," based on the individual. As long as you know what edges your character has, he can call them anything he likes. The names presented here are the ones that have come into common use on hunter-net.

Edgeworks

Each edge provides a description of its effects in the game setting. A system follows for resolving the action with game mechanics. If the system tells you to "roll Perception + Vision," you roll a number of dice equal to the dots in your character's Perception Attribute and Vision Virtue — a unique combination of Traits that's specific to edges. The difficulty is set by the Storyteller, but the average is 6. Such rolls are edge dice pools and can be invested with Conviction (see Conviction, p. 136) to add even more dice.

Most edges can be activated spontaneously, with no effect on their actual use in the turn. Some edges, particularly powerful ones, require Conviction expenditures to be triggered. Conviction points are spent to use the edges. These points are not counted toward any Conviction that you may want to risk on a power, thus increasing the size of any edge dice pools rolled. So, if an edge costs two Conviction to activate, you can still risk whatever Conviction you like, say three, in the edge roll to increase the dice pool. The two points spent are lost for activating the power, but the three points risked may be regained or lost as well, depending on how successful the dice roll is.

Power Scale

Hunter's edges don't necessarily conform to a scale like powers of other games, even other Storyteller games, typically do. Although a level-two edge is often more potent than a level one in the same path, it isn't always. Edges in a path occur in an order appropriate to hunters' needs. An Avenger probably wages his war against the supernatural from the moment of his imbuing, and he needs offensive capabilities right away to carry out his mission. Such powers are therefore immediately available to him. Meanwhile, more esoteric edges that aid his cause but are perhaps not essential to his immediate survival are available later, at higher levels.

The Virtue to which a creed is dedicated, and the goals of the creed itself, determine what kinds of edges are essential to a hunter. A Redeemer is capable of stopping a monster's action (a level-one power) before she can confront any good left in the creature (a level-two power). Meanwhile, a Judge gains perception powers — the ability to gain information to fulfill his role — before he gains the power to enforce a verdict on a creature. The necessities of a hunter's powers are therefore provided to him first, with more versatile edges emerging later.

Of course, characters may possess edges from paths other than their primary one. An Innocent can possess Visionary powers, for example. That freedom is a benefit of character creation and allows you to design the character you really want. Some players may therefore want to gather as many fundamental powers of the various creeds as they can rather than focus on a primary creed and gain its esoteric edges. That's perfectly fine. However, remember that by doing so, your character must necessarily have appropriate scores in all the Virtues; his primary Virtue rating (say, Zeal for a Defender) is limited as a result. Chapter 4 details how primary Virtue rating is sometimes vital to your character's ability to resist the mind- and body-control powers of potent monsters (see p. 134). If your Defender has a low Zeal because you want him to have lots of Mercy and Vision powers, your hunter could be putty in the enemy's hands, and a danger to his fellow hunters as he is forced to turn on them. Consider that danger before you grab for various powers rather than those of your character's true calling.

So hunter edges have a scale all their own. While an Avenger may be more physically capable than an Innocent at the imbuing, both have access to powers important to their values and roles in the hunt. Ultimately, it's this difference in focus between creeds and individual hunters that engenders tolerance, cooperation and alliance among them. Few hunters are capable of going it alone against the unknown. Those who do often die trying. Hunters must pool their strengths and various powers in order to survive and perhaps win the war.

Mercy

Advocates of Zeal explain that the war between humanity and monstrosities has two sides: perpetrator and victim. By their definition, humanity is the victim, and it's hunters' duty to stand up in defiance. Followers of Mercy have a different perspective. They tend to concentrate on individual actors rather than diametrical factions. The Merciful don't follow abstract notions of good and evil. They understand that specific circumstances demand choices and force actions. They refuse to resort to generalizations about any side in the war: "All their kind are the same." "It's for the good of mankind." "I was just following orders." The Merciful measure individuals before delivering any justice or meting out any reward.

A hunter who acts based on Mercy seeks to understand, empathize and even rationalize with the enemy. Outright hostility establishes no common ground on which terms can be established. Unquestioned violence also diminishes friend and foe into one, with no chance for identity or change.

Of course, fighting the war against the unknown isn't any easier for understanding the enemy. Sympathy makes it harder. Anything salvageable within a creature is lost when its dark side is put down. But understanding doesn't equate to tolerance of evil committed wantonly. Sympathy isn't grounds for a stay of execution for a self-proclaimed murderer. At the very least, fighting based on Mercy convinces hunters somewhat that their cause is the right one — that they're doing their individual best.

If your character's instinctive reaction upon the imbuing is to save innocent lives, to put herself in harm's way or to learn the horror's intentions, she may be a follower of Mercy.

Innocence

Although many Innocents are young, there are no age restrictions. Hunters on this primary path answer the Call but do so with no preconceived notions. More than any other hunters, Innocents deal with the immediate present, without holding grudges from the past or scheming for the future. Like others on Mercy's paths, they recognize kindred spirits in monsters — beings with horrific powers and terrible lives foisted upon them. Whereas the Martyr hates what he sees and the Redeemer wants to change it, the Innocent looks on without judgment.

Innocents' unusual candor can sometimes produce unexpected reactions from night-creatures, but more often it simply puts them in danger. Who else could ask a monster a direct question and expect a straight answer? This straightforwardness has led other hunters to give Innocents various nicknames, some meant kindly ("cherubs"), others less so ("bait").

• Hide

The Innocent are often perceived as innocuous, harmless and inconsequential. Being underestimated gives them power. Supernatural creatures literally have a tendency to overlook or miss your character's presence. He's there, but not worth the time, attention or effort, or he simply does not seem to exist. Only when your character specifically draws attention to himself, such as through attacking, does he "appear." Your character could even stand face to face with a creature and have it not acknowledge his presence.

An Innocent often discovers her invisibility among monsters when her first instinctual response to such creatures is to stand gaping or to ask straightforward questions. Creatures either take no notice or their attention must be actively attracted. A rampaging monster that completely bypasses a blatantly obvious Innocent is also a hint that Hide is in use.

System: Roll Wits + Mercy, difficulty 6. A Perception + Alertness roll, difficulty 6, is made for each monster in your character's presence. A single, average roll can be made for a group of monsters. The difficulty is reduced for creatures with extraordinary senses such as smell or hearing, or for creatures that are exceptionally old, powerful or wary. If your character gets more successes, he goes unrecognized. He is seen normally if the enemy gets more successes.

Your character goes unnoticed for the remainder of the scene as long as he does not attract attention to himself. Making physical contact with the enemy or performing blatant acts such as jumping up and down and shouting draws attention. Once creatures know your character is present, they do not forget again. And once one monster in a group recognizes your character, all of the enemy in the vicinity do; one of the monsters doesn't simply swing wildly at the "air." However, standing, talking lowly and walking slowly do not attract unwanted attention.

This power does not work on other hunters or normal humans. It does not function when the user is Incapacitated; supernaturals perceive your character's immobile form.

•• Illuminate

This edge makes it possible for your character and fellow hunters to identify supernatural creatures. Not only does it indicate which beings are inhuman, it suggests what kinds of creatures they are. One drawback to Illuminate is that monsters seem able to perceive its use and can even tell which human generates the effect.

System: Roll Perception + Mercy, difficulty 6. If you get any successes, your character and all hunters in her presence perceive any supernatural creatures in the

area. The effect duplicates and replaces the need for hunters to spend Conviction on second sight (see Conviction, p. 132). Furthermore, this edge allows all affected hunters to recognize the true nature of creatures that otherwise appear normal — warlocks, the recently deceased, shapechangers in human form. These beings seem to be outlined in nimbuses of various colors. Note that Illuminate does not confer any of the resistance to mind or body control that spending a point of Conviction does.

Illuminate lasts 10 minutes for each success rolled. Duration can be extended for another 10 minutes for each Conviction point spent. The power can be deactivated at will and shuts off if the user is Incapacitated.

Creatures exposed by Illuminate perceive the wielder as a source of bright light; she is clearly the one revealing the monsters. Use of Illuminate undoes Hide.

●●● Radiate

If there were ever evidence that hunters are of divine origin, this is it — or, at least, this edge could be used to justify such claims. Once this power is activated, your character radiates a white light that impedes supernatural attacks. People protected by this field appear blurry and indistinct to the eyes of unnatural creatures. The light itself is distinct to hunters but otherwise has no effect on them, whether they're inside or outside the aura. Monsters that do not rely on visual senses are still confused and disoriented by the power.

System: Roll Stamina + Mercy, difficulty 6. Any time a supernatural creature attacks a radiating target, the difficulty of the attack is increased by one for each success achieved in your edge roll. The nature of the attack does not matter — guns, claws, mystic attacks of any sort; all are impeded. For each success you score after the first, your character may also project his light to include one additional person within the aura. That person must be standing within Mercy in yards of your character. The light persists for one turn per success rolled. The edge can be canceled by the user at will, and its protection can be denied to an individual at any time. The power fails completely if your character is Incapacitated.

No monster's mystical sight or other sense can be used to negate the field. Hunter senses, even edge-based ones, are not affected.

●●●● Confront

To use this edge, your character must meet a creature's gaze directly and make no attempt to avoid the monster's attack. Even though your character is a "sitting duck," striking her becomes terribly difficult. The few creatures who've been subjected to this power and are willing to discuss it say that striking becomes emotionally impossible. The hunter seems to embody everything that is (or that ever was) pure, important and valuable to the attacker — perhaps even dredging up emotions the creature had thought lost for centuries. Striking or acting against the hunter seems psychologically suicidal — a crime of grotesque magnitude. Attackers who do force themselves to perform the repellent action find it excruciating.

System: Spend one Conviction point and roll Manipulation + Mercy, difficulty 5. For each success you get, an attacker has to spend a point of Willpower to act against your character. Each subsequent action against your character also requires a Willpower expenditure. The enemy still has to succeed at its attack normally, even though your character makes no attempt to avoid it. This edge functions against only one opponent at a time, unless more can somehow be captured eye to eye, simultaneously. The target remains inhibited as long as your character maintains eye contact.

●●●●● Blaze

Your character can make one light source agonizing and damaging to unnatural creatures of all kinds. The degree of damage inflicted depends on the intensity of the light source. A match is irritating, a powerful flashlight is dangerous and (on a clear day) the sun is destructive.

Blaze is instantaneous: Your character uses this power and the light source in question becomes amazingly powerful for a moment. While the effect does not last, it can traumatize every supernatural creature exposed to the rays. Strangely, Blaze does not work with moonlight.

Some Innocent extremists with this power describe its use as "sharing the true light."

System: Spend two Conviction points and roll Strength + Mercy, difficulty 8. Even one success inflicts the lethal damage dice listed on the following chart, based on the light source used.

Light Source	Damage Dice
Match/ lighter flame	1
Torch/ small flashlight/ flare	3
Large flashlight/ car headlights	5
Bonfire	6
Spotlight or searchlight	8
The sun	10

The range of this power is five yards per success rolled. Thus, all supernatural creatures within range of *your character* (as opposed to the light source, which can be in someone else's possession) when this power is used suffer searing pain. If you score four successes on your edge roll and your character holds a flare (three damage dice), you roll three lethal damage dice against all supernaturals within 20 yards of your character (or against those within range and that are caught in a light beam).

Many artificial light sources are directional and can be pointed at only one or two targets at a time. As a rule of thumb,

using Blaze with a flashlight allows your character to harm three creatures at most, if they're standing close together.

Targets do not have to be physical; spirits and ghosts are vulnerable, too.

Martyrdom

Martyrs are compelled to destroy the unknown and the monstrous, but they can't escape the knowledge that their quarry has (or had) human feelings just as they do. Avengers have a definite us/ them mind-set. Martyrs don't have that luxury. They understand all too well the emotions and motivations of the intolerable. Yet, for all their empathy, followers of this primary path hunt with an almost self-destructive fury.

Martyrs can understand the misery of a compulsive predator, because they are the same. They know that these hideous beings, whose very appearance fills a Martyr with repulsion and disgust, might have once been fully human. Martyrs are therefore miserable with their role, but know that if they pursue it, fewer others will have to share their fate. Every Martyr longs for the day when hunters are obsolete.

• Demand

Martyrs, by definition, are willing to hurt themselves to save another's life or to hurt an enemy. This willingness to chase even Pyrrhic victory is reflected in Demand. Your character is willing to exhaust himself in a desperate bid to accomplish amazing deeds; he puts his all into an action and receives might born from purity of purpose. Martyrs' willingness to sacrifice themselves simply invigorates them with energy and power.

System: Your character can perform an amazing feat of strength at the cost of his own health. Mark a level of bashing damage on your character's Health chart. The damage cannot be soaked. You can now add Mercy to Strength for any roll or action performed that turn, whether it be a roll to inflict brawl or melee damage, an effort to lift an object, or a Strength + Athletics roll to perform a stunt. Willpower cannot be used to further bolster this roll, although Conviction points *can* be risked in any Strength-related roll made.

If Demand is used to increase the damage inflicted with an attack, your character must suffer a bashing health level before the attack is made. If it fails, the health level is still lost, even though no damage roll is made. The punch or swing is still potentially devastating, but doesn't find its mark.

Demand cannot be combined with other attack or physical-action-based edges in the same turn.

•• Witness

Witness allows your character to recognize the nature of supernatural creatures in her presence. It also gives her a glimpse of specified creatures' relationships with mankind.

System: This edge expands upon the capabilties of second sight (see Conviction, p. 132). A creature that seems *wrong* with second sight, but not in any perceptible way — a warlock, a shapechanger in human form, a bloodsucker imitating life signs — is revealed to your character. The monster's horrific side is clear on a successful Perception + Mercy roll, difficulty 6. To your character's eyes, the creature's most horrific aspect flashes across its face. This sight persists for 10 minutes for each success rolled; any creature observed in that time is revealed for what it really is. Witness can therefore be used in conjunction with or can replace the need for second sight while this edge is in effect. Duration can be extended for another 10 minutes for each Conviction point spent. The power can be deactivated at will. Witness provides no mind- or body-control protection.

Additionally, for each success scored after the first in the edge roll, your character can momentarily witness one previous contact had between a human and a monster in your character's presence. The first contact viewed is usually the most recent, and each viewed thereafter occurred further back in time. If multiple monsters are present, your character may choose which is "studied," or recent flashes may be taken from a variety of creatures.

Visions might reveal attacks, such as feeding, or could reveal a passionate or poignant meeting, depending on who was contacted. The Storyteller creates the vision, which can be clear or distorted; participants may be obvious or confused. The image is visual only and is virtually instantaneous. Sometimes such visions suggest regret or even mercy in creatures' attacks, a hint at their true nature.

Witness seems to conjure no images of humans' or hunters' acts, but it does for those people who possess powers or gifts bestowed by unnatural creatures.

••• Ravage

No one's quite sure what the hell happens when a hunter cuts loose with this edge. It seems to produce a roiling heat-haze. This gas (for lack of a better term) pours out of or from your character and travels where he gestures. Physical matter seems unaffected, but supernatural creatures react violently. It seems to corrupt and decay their very bodies. Not even intangible creatures are safe.

Ravage has no *physical* effect on human targets, but it causes deep emotional trauma: headaches, depression, terrified fugues and uncontrolled weeping. As for wielders of Ravage themselves, the power makes them sick. Stomach pains, coughing, blurred vision and vomiting are all associated with the edge.

Martyrs describe the power as, "Tearing something open — like injuring the world. It hurts us, it hurts them — but it hurts them worse."

System: Roll Manipulation + Mercy, difficulty 7. Range is your character's Mercy in yards. If the target is human, the number of successes rolled indicates the number of turns that person is stunned with horror. He suffers no physical damage, and can still dodge or flee, but cannot attack your character or anyone else. (Particularly tough individuals

might be allowed a Willpower roll, difficulty 8, to attempt to perform a particular action.) Another hunter targeted by Ravage goes unaffected if his Conviction defense is active. If not, he is treated like a normal human victim.

If the target is a supernatural creature, it suffers a level of lethal damage for each success rolled. Even intangible opponents are affected, including ones that possess physical hosts.

Every time this edge is used, your character suffers one level of bashing damage that *cannot* be soaked.

•••• Donate

A hunter far along the Martyrdom path can blur the lines between herself and others. Her sense of self becomes so diffused that it's possible to lend that "self" to others for their use. The most obvious loan is physical potency or speed, but less tangible capacities can be donated as well. One Martyr has likened the experience to another person walking a mile in *her* shoes — while she's still in them.

Your character can make this "loan" to any willing person whom she can touch. The exchange is immediate, though not always complete.

If physical qualities are lent, your character is weakened commensurably. Lending mental acuity is a bit more complex: The donor's intellect and attention are literally split between herself and the recipient. This "split attention" can function almost like a two-way radio, with no known limit to the distance separating the two parties. The biggest restriction is time: Your character can share of herself for a limited period.

System: Spend two Conviction points and roll Mercy + the Attribute you want to lend. The difficulty is 7. Your character loses a number of points from that Attribute equal to the number of successes you roll, up to a limit that you stipulate or up to your character's full Attribute score. The recipient gains the same number of points in the same Trait. Any Attribute can be donated, except Appearance. No other Traits — Abilities, Backgrounds — can be conferred with this edge, and no more than one Attribute can be shared at one time.

Donating Physical Attributes is fairly straightforward: Your character's rating is reduced while the subject's is increased. If a Mental Attribute is shared, the two characters can speak to each other telepathically for the duration of the donation; the recipient can use your character's mind as a sort of "parallel processor." If a Social Attribute is donated, telepathic communication is not possible, but both people have a vague sense of how the other feels emotionally.

If your character donates all of one Attribute, she passes out and remains unconscious until the edge wears off. You as a player may continue to advise the recipient in terms of the Trait shared, and as far the as the Storyteller allows. You can contribute solutions to problems if Wits is shared, or suggest emotions to play upon in social situations if Manipulation is lent, but you probably can't advise another player how to do research in either case, because Intelligence hasn't been shared.

The duration of a donation is determined with the following chart:

Successes Rolled	Duration
1-2	Two turns
3-4	The rest of the scene
5-6	Five hours
7-8	One day
9-10	Three days

If your character is conscious, he can cancel donation at any time. However, the recipient cannot choose to "give back" a borrowed Trait at any time; the lender must take it willingly.

If your character becomes Incapacitated while sharing, a donation continues until she regain consciousness. If your character is killed with dots lent out, the recipient loses them immediately. If the receiver dies, your character loses all donated dots, permanently. If you botch the donation roll, your character could lose one point of the Trait in question, permanently, or the Storyteller can devise another mishap. Hunters are already disturbed people. Would the identity of one trapped in the body of another really be acknowledged as anything more than schizophrenia?

••••• Payback

Your character can impose human, mortal limitations and vulnerabilities upon inhuman opponents. He can also rob such beings of their powers. All your hunter has to do is lock his gaze with a supernatural enemy's and concentrate on the specific way he wants to cut that being down to size. The Martyr imposes a righteous moral punishment upon the creature.

System: To inflict a human limitation upon a supernatural being (say, to make a dead thing need to breathe to survive, or a ghost to assume physical form), spend five Conviction points and roll Manipulation + Mercy, difficulty of the target's Stamina +4. If you get even one success, the creature suffers that vulnerability until it leaves your character's presence. (In the case of truly powerful opponents, the Storyteller may impose a higher difficulty to your roll, and may grant a resisted roll, say Willpower, to the creature.) Only one human "failing" can be imposed on a single creature at one time. The circumstances and the Storyteller often determine the immediate results of making a supernatural "mortal" again. Food, not blood, might be required for sustenance. Human form might become the only one a creature can assume. A spirit might become as physical and fragile as he was in life.

Now, an ages-old creature does not turn to dust because it's suddenly mortal, but it could perhaps be destroyed forever by conventional means. Also, beware granting monsters the *strengths* of being human. What bloodsucker would not relish withstanding the sun again? She might even ensure your character's constant presence by capturing him.

This power can also be used to deny a creature use of a certain supernatural power. To do this, you have to specify what the beast is prevented from doing: "I want it to stop moving so fast." "I don't want it fading away again!" "I don't want it to be able to turn invisible." Assuming the Storyteller knows what power you refer to, she sets the difficulty — usually the creature's Willpower rating or Stamina +3. If you get even a single success, the creature cannot use that capability until it leaves your character's presence. Only one power can be denied a creature at one time, and a monstrosity cannot be assigned a human weakness *and* be stripped of a capability simultaneously.

If your character is conscious, she may revoke human weaknesses or reinstate supernatural powers at will, even if she is still in the presence of the victim. If your character is Incapacitated, the effects of Payback fail immediately. And, of course, if a creature manages to leave your character's presence and return, all bets are off. Payback must be used again to impose a human frailty or to strip a monster of the same power previously removed.

Redemption

Individuals whose first instinct is conciliatory tend to find themselves on the primary path of Redemption. Redeemers are widely sought for their ability to put injured people back together, but they often find themselves at odds with hunters who possess different priorities. Some Redeemers aren't afraid to understand their prey. They hope that through understanding they can either settle the spirits that haunt mortal life or remove whatever curse or psychic illness creates "monsters."

• Bluster

A shouted syllable becomes a veritable shield against harm. The word spoken doesn't matter ("No!" "Stop!" and "Don't!" are all common choices), but it can abort any type of deliberate attack. A hunter often learns a word's power when she blurts it out instinctively, and the word amazingly averts harm.

Bluster can turn aside anything from a switchblade to a chain saw — or even arcane weapons such as bolts of fire or lightning. The attack can be made against your character or another person. The edge has no effect on attacks that don't do damage (such as mind-control attempts) or on attacks that are not direct (such as stabbing a voodoo doll of your character). Furthermore, it works only against actions that other individuals undertake. It can protect your hunter or another person from being run down with a car (even if the driver is careless, not actively malevolent.) It cannot stop an avalanche or a natural bolt of lightning.

System: Roll Wits + Mercy, difficulty 6. The roll is typically resisted against the appropriate attack roll made by the enemy, and your character must be able to see — have line of sight to — the action he intends to interrupt. This edge can be used in a turn at any time that a defensive maneuver — dodge, parry or block — can be. In fact, Bluster should be treated like a fourth form of defense for system purposes — all the same mechanics apply (see Defensive Maneuvers, p. 192). This edge cannot actually be combined with dodge, parry or block, though; you must choose one course of defensive action. Note that an attacker can still harm its target, even if your character attempts to avert the action (the attacker gets more successes than you do).

• • Insinuate

Your character has to ask one question of a supernatural creature, and that creature has to understand that a question has been asked. The particular question is not really important, and it doesn't matter if the being replies. What matters is that your character interacts with the creature as if it were a person, not a thing. This simple act, when fueled by hunter spirit, forces the creature to confront mortals in human terms. The edge usually causes intense feelings of sorrow, loss and isolation.

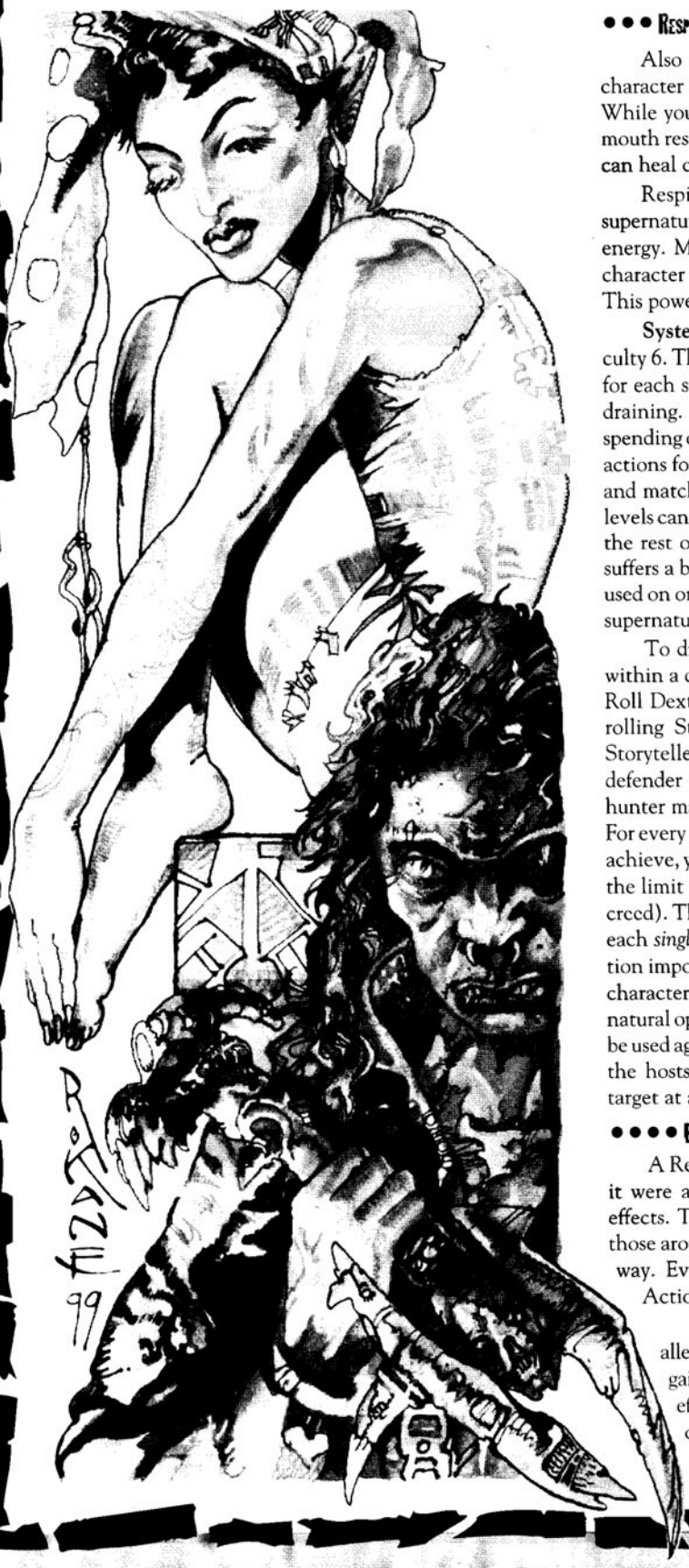
A common question is, "Do you remember?"

System: Roll Manipulation + Mercy, difficulty 6. Each success adds one to the difficulty of the supernatural creature's next intended action. The feat becomes challenging as the being is confronted by forgotten memories, long-dead feelings and desperately suppressed compassion. With a spectacular number of successes, the target may undergo a substantial shift in behavior. Even an undamaged creature who is winning a fight may flee rather than have to face the emotions raised by Insinuate.

The specific psychological effect of this edge depends on the creature confronted, of course. Spirits experience a taste of what life was like before they perished. Bloodsuckers are reminded of their lost mortality. Other creatures may have visions from the lives of people they've slain. More "human" creatures may foresee futures in which they succumb to their monstrous natures, or they may remember a lost love or a choice they regret. Creatures who have very little thought or feeling left may be less affected. Insinuate's visions may simply annoy or confuse them.

The Storyteller decides the exact results of this power in the story, whether as a distraction for a monster, another attempt in an ongoing effort to get through to the buried vulnerability of a creature, or as a cathartic moment (if you roll enough successes) that confronts a being with its very perversity.

Typically, Insinuate can be used against a single creature only once per scene, unless the Storyteller authorizes otherwise.



••• Respire

Also called the "Kiss of Life," this edge allows your character to heal a person by breathing into her mouth. While your character appears to be performing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, this power accomplishes a lot more: It can heal cuts, slashes, damaged organs and broken bones.

Respire can do something altogether different to supernaturals. Instead of infusing healing energy, it steals energy. Mouth-to-mouth contact isn't required. Yet your character must be nearby to inhale the stuff from an enemy. This power is dangerous even to intangible foes.

System: To heal someone, roll Stamina + Mercy, difficulty 6. The target gains one health level, bashing or lethal, for each success achieved. Using Respire in this fashion is draining. You must pay for each level healed either by spending one Conviction or by suffering a +1 difficulty to all actions for the remainder of the scene. (It's possible to mix and match payments. A character who heals three health levels can spend two Conviction and accept a +1 penalty for the rest of the scene.) If a botch is rolled, your character suffers a bashing health level, instead. This edge cannot be used on oneself, but can be used on normal people and even supernatural creatures.

To drain a monstrous enemy, your character must be within a distance of Mercy in yards of the intended target. Roll Dexterity + Mercy, difficulty 6. The target resists by rolling Stamina, also against difficulty 6 (although the Storyteller can modify difficulties for both attacker and defender depending on their relative potency; a simple hunter may be hard-pressed to exhaust an ages-old ghost). For every *two full success* in excess of the opponent's that you achieve, your character gains one point of Conviction, up to the limit of your character's starting Conviction (based on creed). The target also suffers one level of lethal damage for each *single success* rolled (your character's starting Conviction imposes no limit on damage). If your roll botches, your character incurs one level of lethal damage, and the supernatural opponent gains one point of Willpower. Respire can be used against spirits that possess humans, without harming the hosts. It cannot harm humans, and affects only one target at a time.

•••• Becalm

A Redeemer radiates his inner calm and tolerance as if it were an energy form. The edge has two simultaneous effects. The first is physical: Becalm makes it difficult for those around your character to act in a sudden or deliberate way. Events occur slowly. Response times are delayed. Actions seem to be performed as if subjects are groggy.

The second effect is emotional: Becalm stifles anger, alleviates fear and tension, and generally makes subjects gain perspective and relax — at least somewhat. This effect doesn't make the becalmed lose their will to fight or survive. The power doesn't change motivation, it just makes events seem less urgent.

Becalm does not affect normal actions such as speaking or moving slowly, as long as those actions do not have explosive or violent results.

System: Spend one Conviction point and roll Manipulation + Mercy, difficulty 7. The effect lasts a number of minutes equal to the number of successes rolled. During that time, anyone who tries to perform any sort of violent attack or sudden movement has to make a Stamina, Strength or Dexterity roll (whichever is highest), difficulty 8, per action. Even pulling a trigger is affected for the outburst that results. The effect extends five yards in every direction for each point of Mercy your character has. In addition to interfering with or stopping fights, this edge can be used to halt physical seizures or hysterical fits of any type, and can bring supernatural creatures out of frenzies, whatever the cause. Creatures that hope to maintain a frenzied state, despite the challenge of acting in your character's presence, must make a Willpower roll, difficulty 8.

Becalm affects your character as well as any hunters or normal people in its area of deployment. Humans may not behave hysterically in the presence of monsters while becalmed, but they still typically forget or rationalize what they experience afterward. This edge's effect can be terminated prematurely if you choose, and it ceases altogether if your character is Incapacitated.

Attacks, particularly ranged ones, performed outside the area of effect against targets within it are not affected by Becalm.

●●●●● Suspend

Many hunters believe in other worlds, including Heaven, Hell or Purgatory — perhaps even other dimensions or alien planes. A hunter who proceeds this far along the path of Redemption begins to understand that other realms might exist — and suspects that supernatural creatures are tied to them and can travel to and from such places. Certainly, creatures have been known to disappear without a trace, even to hunter sight. This edge denies a monster those escape routes and forces it to face the error of its ways in the here and now. It also protects the world from unspecified "prying eyes." Redeemers who attain this level of dedication rarely discuss what it is they believe is "watching."

Users and witnesses of this power report sensations like popping ears, nosebleeds and headaches, but also a sense of liberation. Some fear horrendous side effects, such as keeping the souls of the recently dead from traveling to their rightful places — trapping those souls on Earth!

System: Spend two Conviction points and roll Charisma + Mercy, difficulty 8. If any successes result, your character seals the material world he knows from all other possible realms for the remainder of the scene. The barrier arises wherever your character can physically see. No supernatural creature may escape your character's presence without leaving conventionally. Any power sources that originate from another plane or reality, and that feed the physical world in your character's proximity, are severed.

Likewise, any supernatural creatures that can enter the physical world are suddenly barred from it in your character's vicinity. They must enter in an area beyond his influence. Otherworldly powers on other planes cannot even perceive the physical realm where your character stands.

Your character may undo the effect early if he chooses, but it persists for the scene, even if he's rendered unconscious.

Vision

Hunters who act from Zeal believe that they know an obvious truth. Hunters who follow paths of Mercy believe in doing what feels right, over following some personal standard. And then there are a few who believe there is yet another course — it just hasn't been marked yet.

Like Zealots, these hunters set their sights to the distance and try to perceive a big picture. Like the Merciful, they are willing to consider new ideas and sensations with an open mind. Some are dreamers, some are outcasts. A radical few believe there is no truth, beauty or morality beyond what we make ourselves. Hunters on this primary path pursue freedom for all. Rather than fight to win battles against the unknown, they fight to end the war.

Visionaries don't pick one of the most obvious reactions to the Call. If your character doesn't attack, doesn't intervene and doesn't run away at her imbuing, but still does *something* — probably something clever and unpredictable — she could be a disciple of Vision. If her first response is curiosity, a need to know what the *thing* is and what it intends, rather than whether it should be destroyed or pitied, she probably sees the forest, not the trees.

She supports no accepted truth that she hasn't tested herself. "Yes, the punishment should fit the crime, but who should be punished, the criminal or the society that creates him?" "Of course gravity works, but does my soul rise or fall when I die?" Life is about the search for answers, which lie everywhere. The proponent of Vision simply looks for the right questions. In the fight against the unknown, her foremost question is: "How can this conflict be settled, *once and for all?*"

There is currently only one creed and path for followers of this Virtue, at least as far as hunters are able to tell.

Visionary

Visionaries perceive the intrusion of the paranormal into their everyday lives as a sign that the world is a larger and stranger place than they had ever dreamed. Once a firmly held belief — "There are no such things as monsters" — is yanked from its place beneath your worldview, it makes you wonder what other supports are worm-eaten. Visionaries are unwilling to jump to conclusions and dive into half-formed solutions. As a result, they keep their hunter allies on a higher road, thus avoiding pointless switchbacks and literal dead ends.

While Zealots ask, "What can destroy them?" and the Merciful wonder, "How can we help?" Visionaries take a step back and simply ask, "What are they?" This introspection has earned these hunters several nicknames. Those who respect Visionaries call them "pathfinders" and "wayfarers." Those who have little use for them apply names like "navel-gazers" or simply "fools."

• Foresee

While most hunters would simply be glad to have this power, Visionaries are compelled to debate its nature. One group suspects that it's a form of telepathy — if such a thing exists — that allows them to anticipate probabilities and the actions of others. Some think Foresee allows hunters a brief glimpse into the future — a look that allows them to choose the best course of action. Either way, your character has a momentary flash of how his choices might affect a situation, and may choose the best option available to him.

System: Roll Intelligence + Vision, difficulty 7. For each success achieved, you may make one extra roll for a specified action and choose the best result. You must announce in advance that one of your extra rolls will be dedicated to a particular action; you can't wait until a roll has been made and then announce that an extra one will be taken. Only one extra roll is allowed per action. You might make two rolls to fire a gun, lift a rock or steer a car. (An attack is considered a single action; an extra roll is made for the attack itself. The better attack roll determines how many damage dice are rolled.)

The Storyteller literally narrates a vision had by your character based on each of the die rolls you make, then lets you choose which occurs. One roll might indicate a missed attack, whereas the other scores a hit. One roll might indicate a marginal success, whereas the other indicates a resounding one. Remember that visions are simply glimpses of short-term possibilities; the course you choose as a result may not have the more desirable results in the long term. Your character might envision what wire to cut to deactivate a bomb, but the building saved might still be possessed by a vicious poltergeist.

Foresee influences only an immediate action performed. A simple action that has direct results can convey clear images. An involved action, such as building a device through extended actions, does not reveal consequences of the final creation or its use. More likely, it indicates the possible results of the effort at your character's current stage in the process.

After you make the extra roll and your character sees a vision of both outcomes, one of the results must be chosen. Your character commits to the action — he simply averts events in time for optimal effect. If both rolls are poor, one of them still takes place. There's simply no good way out of the situation.

Foresee may be used to gain a number of extra rolls only once per chapter (game session). Once those extra rolls are used up, the edge cannot be activated again that chapter. Re-rolls granted by the Destiny Background cannot usually be combined with Foresee in the same scene.

Activating Foresee is considered a reflexive action. It does not preclude taking actions in the same turn.

Extra rolls gained cannot be doled out to other players. Neither can your character forewarn other characters of impending events or the ramifications of actions.

Conviction points invested into a Foresee roll simply increase the number of extra rolls you may gain for a chapter. Conviction does not affect the outcome of the individual actions to which extra rolls are dedicated.

• • Pinpoint

This edge gives your character insight into the weaknesses of a supernatural creature. Sometimes, the information comes in the form of a vision (usually of a place or object of importance). Other times it is simple intuition — your character "just knows" that the creature can't use its powers freely under certain circumstances, for example.

Pinpoint is often used after a creature has been detected (through second sight) and recognized (through edges such as Discern, Illuminate or Witness), as part of a plan of attack. The truly informed hunter is the most likely to survive. Thoroughly experienced hunters can also use this edge to *identify* some monsters through their weaknesses — "It feeds on pain to survive. Mostly zombies do that — mostly."

System: Roll Perception + Vision, difficulty 6. If you get a success, your character learns a weakness about the creature she observes: impalement, sunlight, garlic, cold iron, running water, silver, fire or anything else the Storyteller deems appropriate. The Storyteller can also be elusive or vague about the nature of a weakness — "life," "time" or "control." Just because your character asks a question doesn't mean she understands the answer.

Some creatures are tied to particular locations or objects. If you get three or more successes on the roll, your character not only knows that the creature has a lair (or is attached to a specific item), she gets a vague sense of where that object/ place is.

Knowing a weakness and capitalizing on it are two different things. Turning fire on an opponent in an oil refinery isn't safe for anyone. A specific variety of ferrous metal to be used as a weapon probably isn't conveniently at hand.

Once your character has determined a specific weakness of a being, Pinpoint does not repeat that failing. It's up to you to remember the flaw. Subsequent use of Pinpoint against the same kind of creature turns up a new weakness, whether concrete or obscure. Of course, there's no telling if a new failing classifies an unidentified creature as anything your character has faced before.

Pinpoint has no effect on mortals. It can be used only once per scene. Whatever force — presumably the Messengers — that provides the information requested doesn't

seem to tolerate holding hands. Subsequent uses in the same scene simply draw blanks.

Ultimately, the Storyteller decides how effective this edge is under any given circumstances. The answers it provides may not be any help in the here and now, but may be in the next chapter.

●●● Delve

Also known as "Past Viewing," this power lets the user see into the past of a specific area. Whereas other edges (particularly Pierce) also allow visions of the past, Delve is both more specific and more versatile.

Delve is keyed to place: Your character can see the past of her current location only. However, there is no known limit to how far back she can see. Visions can be commanded according to time ("What happened here 24 hours ago?"), by connection to a person or object ("Show me what happened when the jewels were taken.") or in connection to an event ("I want to see the murder as it occurred.").

With a supreme effort, your character can even *hear* what transpired.

System: Roll Perception + Vision, difficulty 6. For each success, your character gets five minutes of "viewing" at the location.

If the event took place more than a year ago, the difficulty increases by two. It increases to 10 for any event that occurred more than five years ago. (Yet one of the truly potent disciples of Vision claims to have witnessed a millennia-old civilization to which he felt a bond. At least, he claimed such a revelation before his disappearance.)

To hear as well as see, you must either spend two Conviction or raise the difficulty by two. Only people with Visionary as their primary path can use Delve to "hear" the past.

The Storyteller ultimately decides how clear an image is. Traumatic events, chaos or intense anger experienced at the time and place witnessed may distort events. The Storyteller may even want to make Delve rolls secretly for players to keep them guessing about the veracity of their insights.

Delve can be used only once per scene.

●●●● Restore

This is the power to regrow lost or mangled limbs and organs. It's not just accelerated healing. Restore can bring back body parts that were lost completely. It can be applied to your character himself or used on other people. These regenerated limbs are often eerily "perfect" — lacking scars, suntans, wrinkles or, indeed, any signs of aging — as if they're idealized, Platonic manifestations of such body parts. Although Restore is powerful, it cannot bring the dead back to life.

Your character imagines mending skin and knitting bones, or a perfect limb or body part to replace that lost, and it manifests. The few hunters who can use this edge hold it up as proof of an idealized state out there somewhere — a place Visionaries are meant to discover. Perhaps this place or condition is the ultimate object or goal in the war against the unknown. Meanwhile, hunters capable of this power keep it secret for fear of drawing unwanted attention — or persecution.

System: This edge effectively turns lethal damage into bashing damage. It doesn't actually restore any lost health levels, but it does make injuries a lot more bearable.

Roll Stamina + Vision and spend three Conviction points. The difficulty is 6, plus one for each lethal health level the subject has lost (maximum difficulty of 10). If the roll gets even one success, all those levels become bashing immediately. If lost health levels represented massive injuries (mangled eyeballs, lost limbs) they grow back in seconds. The new limbs are sore, weak and bruised until the subject has a chance to break them in.

Restore can be used only once per scene.

●●●●● Augur

Your character can anticipate likely futures at her specific location. All she has to do is concentrate. As with Delve, this power can be based on time frame, person, object or a specific event.

System: Spend three Conviction points. The Storyteller secretly rolls your character's Intelligence + Vision score, difficulty 8. For each success achieved, a vision of the future lasts for one minute. Visions of a year or two in advance can come through relatively clearly, but glimpses of the distant future are notoriously vague and disorienting. Unlike Delve, this edge cannot generate sound.

The Storyteller makes the roll in case it fails or botches. On a fail, no vision appears and your Conviction is wasted. On a botch, a wildly inaccurate, deceptively false or devastatingly harrowing vision of the future appears (and Conviction is simply gone when the character tries to draw upon it next). Even on a successful roll, images could be based on a *possible* future, as determined by the millions of decisions and coincidental events that transpire to create reality. (Any Conviction points won through a successful roll can be awarded quietly later, so the player doesn't immediately know a vision is legitimate.) The Storyteller should base images on events as she knows them in the coming chronicle. However, some events may specifically not occur, so no visions can be had of them, despite successes rolled. If a character's ally has died and he doesn't know it, searching for a vision of when she will next come through his door is futile (at least, that's true for her next *living* appearance).

Augur can be used only once per scene. Repeated efforts inflict punishing headaches and blurry images at best. Rumor holds that the few hunters supposedly capable of this power are preoccupied with the future and barely manage to exist in the present.

Zeal

This is the Virtue of hunters who typically have one clear, all-encompassing perspective on and answer to the supernatural. For the most part that response is "destroy it." If your character's first instinctive reaction to seeing a horror is to take direct action against it, she is probably an adherent of Zeal. She tends to act from notions of capital-letter Right and Wrong. Her principles and maxims may not be usual or even particularly agreeable, but they are hers and she upholds them tenaciously.

Defense

Zeal demands dedication, unswerving loyalty and purpose. Defenders aspire to these qualities and seek to see horrors destroyed. Yet, followers of this primary path recognize the need to protect the people, places and things that must survive the war. If nothing remains when the battle is done, what was it fought for?

Defenders protect the normal people, but not with the heedless abandon of some Martyrs. Defenders tend to be thinkers and strategists who know they can't take the fight to the enemy if their flank is exposed. Destroying the enemy is pointless if they die in the process, or if they can achieve a "victory" only by ruining what they hope to save.

Defenders tend to be optimistic. If a situation looks bad, they make an orderly retreat and live to fight another night. If the enemy brings the fight to their doorstep, Defenders struggle to the last drop of blood.

• Ward

Whether through sheer determination, monsters' fear, or some invisible barrier, a Defender can keep supernatural creatures at bay. They cannot approach her unless she allows it or their will is stronger than hers. A character using Ward sees and feels a crackling energy radiate from her body. Creatures making contact with her aura spark a static charge; no damage is done, but monsters' limits of approach are demarcated.

System: Roll Stamina + Zeal, difficulty 6, when this power is activated. The number of successes achieved must be exceeded in a Stamina roll for each monster to approach your character. The distance that creatures are held at bay is one yard in radius for each point of Zeal your character possesses. A monster already within that area when this power is activated receives a Stamina roll immediately. If it succeeds, the creature is unaffected. If the roll fails, the monster staggers back to the power's perimeter.

Ward persists for the remainder of the scene. Each creature is allowed one roll to penetrate it. A Willpower point must be spent for a creature to allow it another attempt.

The edge does not affect other hunters or normal humans, and those people may take shelter in your character's proximity.

A Defender doesn't have to concentrate on this power for it to persist; she can fight and perform other actions while warding. However, the power fails if your character is Incapacitated, and it does not interfere with incoming ranged attacks. If a creature is ever forced back and cornered by a character using this edge, the monster may end up *inside* the Defender's perimeter if the character approaches too close. The monster "breaches" Ward automatically as a result of the Defender's exuberance.

•• Rejuvenate

Defenders are remarkably hard to put down for good. Minor injuries (slight abrasions, bruises) close up and heal visibly. Strained joints stop swelling on their own and pop back into place spontaneously. Even broken limbs straighten out, lock into place and heal within days or sometimes hours. Perhaps even more miraculous, Defenders can impart some of their healing upon others.

System: Your character's health levels lost through bashing damage heal at a rate of one every 10 minutes.

Lethal damage heals according to the following chart. These rates supersede normal recovery times, but are still cumulative. (It takes 21 hours to recover fully from Injured, for example.)

Health Level	Recovery Time
Bruised	Three hours
Hurt	Six hours
Injured	12 hours
Wounded	One day
Mauled	Three days
Crippled	One week
Incapacitated	Three weeks

The Defender lays his hands upon a subject to heal the injuries of another. Spend Conviction to restore a subject's most severe wound (her "lowest" lost level). One Conviction must be spent to restore a level lost to bashing damage. Two Conviction must be spent to restore a level lost to lethal damage. That health level is restored in the same time it takes a Defender with this edge to recuperate, as indicated above — 10 minutes for a level lost to bashing damage, one day for a Wounded level lost to lethal damage, for example. Healing can be applied to other imbued, humans and even willing supernatural creatures that possess bodies.

Destroyed is destroyed, of course, no matter who the recipient of this power is.

Conviction cannot be used to enhance this edge; its effects occur automatically.

Rejuvenate applies to healing health levels only; the edge does not increase recovery time from drug or alcohol abuse, or counteract poisons that do not reduce health levels, for example. Likewise, the edge does not cure any long-term illness such as cancer or re-grow lost appendages.

••• Brand

Your character's hand crackles with energy and, when laid upon a supernatural creature, can burn a mark on it. This sign isn't just skin deep; the brand smolders through any clothing that covers it. Sturdy coverings like armor aren't burned through, but do become tremendously hot, possibly enough to damage the wearer.

The brand is about the size of a palm and can be in the shape of any symbol in the hunter image language. "Monster" or "Corruption" are commonly used (see p. 282for more information). The sign is visible to everyone — even mortals who aren't hunters. Furthermore, the brand can be seen even if the target becomes invisible to normal sight or changes appearance (the brand can still be seen by hunters for whom second sight is not currently active).

Defenders use this power to mark the enemy for their fellows to see, and to alienate victims from their own kind (Brand does not affect objects, normal people or other hunters). Although a visible brand doesn't expose a shapechanger or bloodsucker as such, it certainly sets him apart as the one-time opponent of another hunter, and therefore as a possible threat to protect against. To the uninitiated, such as normal people, a brand seems like a disturbing — even ominous — tattoo.

System: To use this edge, your character must touch the target, which may require a Dexterity + Brawl roll if the target resists (no brawling damage can be done; punches are insufficient to place a brand). Then roll Zeal, difficulty 6. The number of successes achieved determines how long the brand remains.

Successes	Duration
1-2	One day
3-4	One week
5-6	One month
7-8	One year
9-10	Forever

If no successes are rolled, the sign doesn't take.

A brand is a constant source of irritation for a creature. A target suffers one lethal health level for each success achieved in your Zeal roll. That damage can be soaked if possible for the creature in question (but at least one lethal health level is always inflicted). All but one level of any damage can be healed, and that last level passes only when the brand fades. The sign persists no matter what form a creature takes. It even marks disembodied spirits that your character passes through. A brand can be removed prematurely, but only by the hunter who placed it.

Investing Conviction in a Brand roll increases your Zeal dice pool.

•••• Champion

Sometimes, the best way to protect someone or something is to make the monster come to you. A Defender uses this edge to force his foes to confront him instead of others. Calling the enemy out is always a calculated risk. The Defender doesn't want to sacrifice himself — he's not a Martyr, after all — he simply draws attention to himself in hopes of preserving another person or thing, and with the intent of winning the battle. Indeed, Defenders this far advanced along their path may acquire this edge because they finally have the power to confront the enemy one-on-one, as opposed to when they were newly imbued and kept creatures at bay with Ward.

When this edge is activated, a monster has difficulty focusing its attention on anything but your character, because the Defender appears to be the weakest "prey" among the flock, the most compelling challenge, the most fun to toy with or the most imposing danger. Your hunter's "appeal" is determined by the motives or intentions of the offending creature. This edge is often triggered by feigning weakness or stupidity, or by a simple taunt: "You don't look so tough!" or "Pick on someone your own size!"

By diverting creatures, this edge presents tactical possibilities that Defenders are quick to exploit. It can allow others to slip past monsters unnoticed or lure monsters into well-prepared ambushes.

System: A monster must have continuous and direct line of sight to the Defender for this power to work. Spend one Conviction point and roll Appearance + Zeal, difficulty 6. The Storyteller rolls the monster's Wits, difficulty 6, in a resisted action (if a night-creature is truly ancient or powerful, Willpower may be rolled, instead). If your roll wins, the monster focuses its attention on your character alone and disregards others in the area, despite even its better judgment. If the monster receives more successes, it may behave normally and address whomever it wishes.

Each point of Conviction spent after the first in a single use of this power causes Champion to affect two additional monsters (one point affects one creature, two points can affect up to three creatures, three points can affect up to five monsters). A resisted Wits roll is made for each creature, in turn, against your single Appearance roll. An individual monster may overcome Champion (i.e., win the resisted roll) without disrupting the effect upon its fellows.

Champion can be used against each creature only once per scene. If an effort fails, another attempt cannot be made against the same target that scene.

If a monster has no intention of attacking anyone in a situation, activation of Champion doesn't force the creature to attack the user. The creature might simply focus its dialogue on your character alone, disregarding others in the area. If the creature does intend harm but finds it impossible to attack the Defender — say, the hunter is out of reach — then the effect ends immediately. Thus, you cannot combine this edge with Ward or Burden (the level-two Judgment edge). Neither could your character invoke Champion and then race for concealment. The Defender must stand his ground and be prepared to receive attention or an attack, or remain visible and be accessible to the monster.

The effects of Champion persist until the Defender deactivates the edge (and he may choose to do so at any time), until the hunter is rendered Incapacitated, or until someone else attacks the supernatural. A monster regains control when any of these situations occurs. However, a creature can also make a conscious effort to break away while Champion still applies. Make another resisted Wits roll against the hunter's initial Appearance + Zeal successes. Each such attempt costs the creature a Willpower point. One attempt is allowed per turn and costs an action.

••••• Burn

When this edge is activated, your character is infused with a searing energy. Visible to all hunters and supernatural creatures alike, this energy looks like a seething, red-yellow glow, almost as if your character has lava running through his veins. Touching (or being touched by) a hunter in this state is painful and damaging.

System: Roll Stamina + Zeal, difficulty 6, and spend two Conviction points to activate this edge. Burn lasts one turn for each success rolled. During that time, when anyone touches or is touched by your character, roll lethal damage dice equal to the number of successes you achieved. If your character strikes someone barehanded, burn damage is added to your brawling damage pool (and the whole attack is considered lethal).

Burn does not damage inanimate objects (such as clothes or tools) but can hurt any animate creature, including normal people and disembodied spirits through which your character passes. Burn can be deactivated at will, or ceases after your successes run out or your character is Incapacitated.

Judgment

Zeal makes demands upon all of its followers: to see the supernatural destroyed. Avengers respond with punishment for the guilty. Defenders answer by singling out that which must be protected or remembered, and damning the rest. Followers of the primary path of Judgment walk the line between. Judges prevail when it's clear that the unknown cannot be tolerated, but when the greatest good is not certain.

A Judge places all his faith in higher values and ideals. However, unlike other adherents of Zeal, the Judge knows that answers aren't necessarily obvious. You can't always cut to the heart of the problem with a single blow. And sometimes protecting something in battle only makes you responsible for it throughout the war. Many Judges, in fact, question the instinctive reactions of their more direct or determined colleagues. Judges don't do what they want, they do what they have to, and they do what's right. If that means sparing even monsters, despite innocent lives lost — perhaps

to discover the creatures' master — then that's the price of the greater good.

• **Discern**

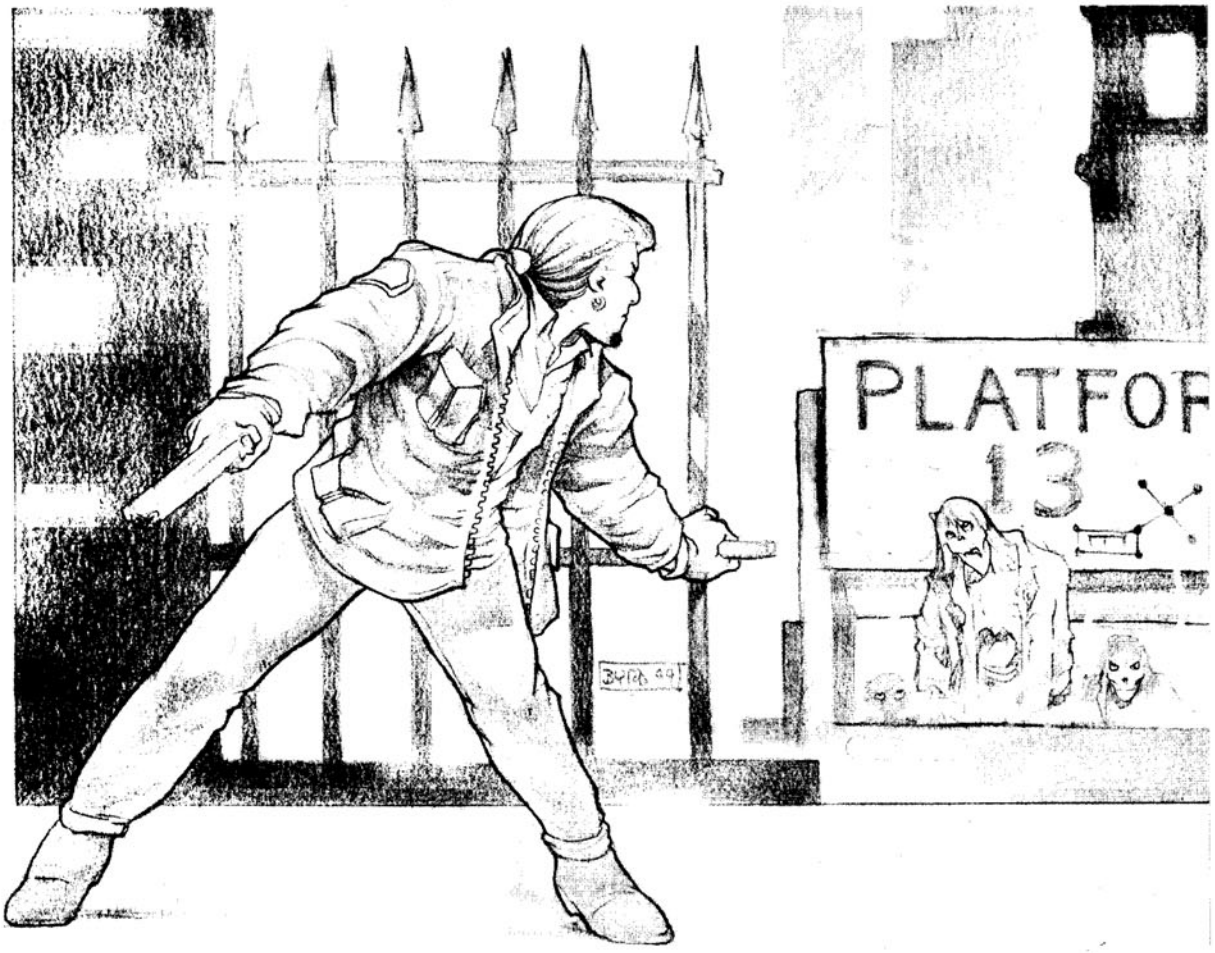
Your character exhibits a hyper-alertness to supernatural creatures, a surreal perspective that allows her to perceive things about the unknown that most could not. She might notice that a hand laid on a desk leaves no heat impression, that a person's eyes don't dilate with changing light, or that a being simply doesn't breathe. Such information is usually enough to determine the approximate kind of creature a Judge faces.

Also, your character cannot be blinded, even if her eyes are closed or she's in utter darkness. This power also permits vision when your character's eyes have been dazzled (or torn out, for that matter). The hunter can see what's in front of her face as if she were in a clear, well-lit room, regardless of the real conditions. Even formerly bad eyesight is corrected miraculously.

System: This power is typically used under one of two circumstances: When your character tries to identify a supernatural creature, or when she tries to see in the dark or when otherwise blind. In either case, roll Perception + Zeal, usually against a difficulty of 6. The effects of Discern last for 10 minutes for each success rolled. Duration can be extended for another 10 minutes for each Conviction point spent. The power can be deactivated at will.

Second sight reveals creatures that use magic to hide, that disguise themselves in unassuming forms, or that are simply not human or alive, but it does not reveal the true natures of those beings. Discern exposes the features that identify those creatures. That which does not breathe might be the walking dead. A brutish person with rapid breathing might be a shapechanger. A newly dead spirit has now-obvious deathmarks. A bloodsucker's pawn could have abnormally bulging veins and pallid skin. Assuming a Judge knows what kind of creature such details apply to, she can coordinate an appropriate attack or defense. Discern can therefore be used in conjunction with or can replace need for second sight while the edge is in effect. Discern provides no mind- or body-control protection, though.

Furthermore, if abomination activity has occurred recently in an area or to a person, your character may sense what kind of creature — restless spirit, walking dead, skinchanger — was responsible with sufficient Discern successes



(two or more). This assumes she properly interprets any evidence left behind — hair, blood, a corpse.

When avoiding blindness, ignore the Blind Fighting/Fire rules (see p. 192).

This edge operates only when invoked. It's not "always on."

•• Burden

Your character can imprison a supernatural creature briefly, fixing it to the ground where it stands (in some cases, "freezing it in the space it occupies" might be more accurate). Some Judges theorize that the overpowering scrutiny that occurs with the edge is more than the guilty consciences of monsters can bear, and they're immobilized.

Your character must look at the thing and hold it in her gaze. (Eye-to-eye contact is not required. Blinking is allowed, but looking away long enough to attack anything else or pay attention to anything else sets the creature free.) The entity can still act — speak, fight, use any powers it possesses — but it cannot move more than a foot from where it is. More than one creature can be burdened at one time, as long as they can all be seen simultaneously. Some creatures have capabilities that allow them to move into other realms or at superhuman speeds. These powers can sometimes be used to break free of Burden.

System: Your character glares at the creature (the Storyteller decides whether multiple targets stand close enough together to all be captured in one look). Roll Stamina + Zeal. The difficulty for an individual creature is Stamina +3. One roll is also made to immobilize a group. Use the highest Stamina from the group; if the roll fails, none of the creatures is affected. For each success you get, the enemy is stuck for one turn. If your character takes her eyes off the target(s) during that time (or if her gaze is interrupted by some outside influence), the "spell" is broken.

This edge does not work on human beings, not even victims of paranormal creatures. However, people who have been changed in some way by supernatural entities — given powers or unnatural gifts — can be targeted normally. Thus, a person possessed by a spirit can be liberated with this power if the spirit can be perceived and riveted to the spot. The host may simply be pulled away; the spirit passes through and the victim regains control of her body.

While burdening a creature, your character has to keep his eyes on that being. He *can* attack it or otherwise interact with it, but attacking anything else frees the being. (And some ferocious attacks staged against the target itself may even break your character's hold if he's forced to look away at any point. The recoil from a shotgun, for example, may cause your Judge to avert his eyes for a moment. The Storyteller decides when such an overwhelming attack occurs.)

Beasts with powers of unnatural movement — amazing speed, teleportation — can roll Stamina + the relevant Trait to attempt to escape Burden. The difficulty is either 7 or your character's Zeal rating, whichever is higher.

••• Balance

With this power, your character can deny an entity access to its source of strength (usually an energy stolen from humankind). To use this edge, your character must look at the creature and verbally curse it in some fashion. This can be anything from, "By my oath, no blood shall nourish you today!" to a simple, "Starve, bastard!"

System: Roll Wits + Zeal. Your difficulty is the opponent's Stamina +2. The opponent cannot use any power or perform any function that requires supernatural energy. In the case of the creatures presented in Chapter 9, Willpower cannot be spent to utilize supernatural powers, although it can still be used to perform "mundane" feats such as get an automatic success while performing an action. The effect lasts for one hour per success rolled, even if the creature leaves your character's vicinity.

•••• Pierce

A character with this edge is a human lie detector. When she hears a falsehood, she typically experiences a distinct (and very unpleasant sensation). The feeling is different for each hunter. Some perceive it as a foul smell, others as a queasy feeling, still others as a brief flash of light. Whatever form the warning takes, it is unique and cannot be mistaken for anything else.

Furthermore, your character develops a specialized form of postcognition — the ability to share a subject's memories of the past. Specifically, if your character touches a person who has had an encounter with a supernatural being, she has a vision of that person's most recent encounter. If your character touches a supernatural creature, she receives a vision of the creature's past — either looking back on its encounters with a certain object, person or place, or casting back to a specific, short period of time ("What were you doing on the night of July 9, 1994?"). These visions are all silent.

System: Pierce operates for a full scene at the cost of one Conviction. When a lie is told in your character's presence, the Storyteller rolls dice equal to your character's Perception + Zeal, difficulty 6. If the power is successful and the statement is a lie, the falsehood is detected, no matter how skilled the liar. If the power fails, your character doesn't know one way or the other. Furthermore, if the roll is successful but no lie is told, the hunter doesn't know that anything is out of sorts (clever Storytellers sometimes make rolls when a character with Pierce hears the truth, just to keep the player honest). If you want to *risk* Conviction points on a lie-detection Pierce roll, tell the Storyteller how many and he can incorporate the results into the roll.

To gain visions of the past, the Judge must touch the being concerned. No Conviction points need be spent for this version of the edge. Make a Perception + Zeal roll, difficulty 7 (this difficulty may be increased if the target resists physically or if special measures have been taken to obscure the subject's memories). If the roll is successful, a vision is seen. In the case of a human subject, the vision is of his last contact with a supernatural being. Remember,

these images are from the subject's memory. He might not have witnessed events that occurred around him in his past. Conversely, he might suppress memories that your character can draw to the fore.

In the case of a supernatural subject, you must stipulate a memory associated with a specific person, place or object. Alternatively, your character may witness a creature's memory of a specific time — a day, evening, hour or even moment. In fact, the Storyteller could insist on memories relevant to an object *and* a time frame.

The number of successes achieved in a Perception + Zeal roll to witness memories determines how far back your character can look. A perceived event can have occurred as far back as one week for each success rolled.

One roll cannot be made to activate lie detection *and* to look into a subject's memories; the two effects must be rolled separately.

●●●●● Expose

When your character uses this edge, the *normal people* around him become aware of any supernatural beings in their presence. The creatures are immediately perceptible for what they truly are, despite how they seek to hide themselves with unnatural powers. The effect does not apply to revealing hunters as anything unusual; most look perfectly normal.

System: Roll Zeal, difficulty 8, and spend two Conviction points. The number of successes achieved indicates how far from your character the effect extends.

1 Success	A 15-foot radius
2-3 Successes	A 50-foot radius
4-5 Successes	A city-block
6-7 Successes	An acre
8+ Successes	A one-mile radius

This edge reveals all monsters in the area with the most horrific aspect of their appearance. This visage is momentary, but enough to expose a creature as an abomination. A vampire looks like a blood-lusting horror, a shapechanger appears as a man-beast, and a ghost is a looming spectral figure. A creature doesn't actually *change* in any way; it's appearance simply alters to human onlookers.

How common people respond to the horrors that they're exposed to depends on the circumstances. Essentially, they see creatures just as your character first saw them upon being imbued. However, normal people still have a sanity mechanism that tells them to run and hide from many monsters, or that rationalizes what they witness to interpret it as harmless. So Expose doesn't necessary bring torch-bearing hordes to your character's side. But, then again, the same sturdy people who could confront a cocky or careless hunter who presents himself publicly might just as easily act against a monstrous entity (see Edge Appearances, p. 145).

Certainly, exposing a creature to human sight undoes all the stealth and secrets behind which the monster hides, so this edge can save a hunter's very life — the creature unveiled may flee rather than remain exposed. And revealing a mayoral candidate as a night-creature can't do his campaign any good, even if people don't quite recall what it was that was wrong with him.

Expose does not create the circumstances required to imbue anyone. Human witnesses do not suddenly become hunters or bystanders. The edge can be used only once per scene; its sweeping effect is taxing.

Vengeance

This primary path takes Zeal and runs with it. Those who follow it are widely called Avengers, but are also known as punishers, executioners or slayers. In the United States' bible belt, they're sometimes called "soldiers of God."

Avengers are obsessed with settling the score. Evil must be punished. Compromise is not an option. Without swift, terrible retribution for the guilty, life consists of little more than fear of evil and an unfounded hope for safety. It doesn't matter if revenge isn't pleasant or convenient or safe: It is essential.

Avengers' primary goals are to attack and destroy. The best defense is a strong offense. Sometimes mishaps occur or the wrong people get hurt in the process, but that's the price paid for cleansing the Earth.

● Cleave

Any melee weapon your character wields suddenly becomes much more potent. The weapon can already be dangerous — a knife, a baseball bat — or be fairly harmless — a stick, a broken bottle. Even your character's own fist or body becomes deadly. There are also stories of hunters brandishing red-hot, glowing blades, and a rumor of a one-armed hunter growing a phantom limb with which to strike at the enemy. Regardless of the form a weapon takes, it can damage just about anything it touches — werewolves, ghosts, stout doors, intrusive people.

A weapon created spontaneously with this power persists as long as your character wills it to or while she remains conscious. Existing weapons that are empowered can endure only so much punishment before being ruined. An empowered object doesn't necessarily look any different, but it feels warm to the touch to the wielding hunter, and seems to vibrate with energy of its own. In cases of manifested blades and limbs, only hunters and supernatural beings can see the weapons.

System: Your character empowers a single held weapon or manifests a weapon where none was before. Roll Dexterity + Brawl or Melee to attack, as normal. An existing weapon that's empowered inflicts an additional +2 damage. All damage is also lethal, no matter what is normally appropriate to the item used. A spontaneously manifested weapon does Strength +2 lethal damage. Cleave attacks

can harm immaterial beings and normal people. When Conviction is invested in Cleave, the extra dice are added to a single attack dice pool; any subsequent successes are added to the damage dice pool.

The downside to this power is that hand-held weapons can't endure the energy that courses through them. A crowbar eventually snaps. A baseball bat shatters. A fire ax splits. Once this power is activated, a melee weapon is useable in combat for one turn for each point that it adds to Strength for determining damage (see the Melee Weapons Chart, p. 198). Thus, a knife (Strength +1 damage) lasts for one turn of use with Cleave before breaking. A club (Strength +2 damage) lasts for two turns. An ax (Strength +3 damage) lasts for three turns.

The only way to keep a melee weapon from being destroyed and remaining useable beyond its time limit is to make a Zeal roll, difficulty 6, in every subsequent turn (this roll is a reflexive action). If the roll succeeds, the weapon can be used to attack with Cleave again in that turn. If the roll fails, the weapon is ruined. This Zeal roll represents your character's effort to harness and control his passion for the cause.

Cleave applies to melee weapons only, not ranged ones. Spontaneously fabricated weapons are relatively rare among hunters. Individuals who can create red-hot swords out of thin air somehow believe themselves able to twist reality to begin with, whether due to derangements, amazing will or staunch belief in religion or fate. If your character's worldview can't rationalize his defiance of physics — even with the knowledge that monsters are real — then he probably improves upon weapons already held.

•• Trail

Your character touches a supernatural target and causes that person or thing to leave a smoky streamer behind it. This trail is usually visible only to the hunter who places it, although characters using Discern, Witness or Illuminate may perceive others' trails. The streamer roils in the direction in which the subject traveled. A trail can neither be touched or felt. Likewise, it cannot be dissipated by wind, by being walked through or by anything else that would scatter a physical fog.

A creature or person being followed cannot see the trail unless it specifically possesses preternatural perceptions (Storyteller's discretion).

System: All your character has to do is touch (or in some cases pass through) a supernatural target to activate this power. Roll Perception + Zeal, difficulty 6. The trail lasts six hours for each success achieved. Duration can be measured in days, instead, if a point of Conviction is spent. All of your character's trails are identical.

Some supernatural creatures can pass into spaces different from humanity's physical world. If a creature does so, the trail ends abruptly where the creature phased out or disappeared. The trail resumes when the beast returns to the physical world.

Spotting a trail is difficulty 7 for the Discern, Illuminate and Witness edges. This is also the difficulty for creatures with supernatural perceptions.

This power does not affect mundane people or objects.

••• Smolder

This edge produces a cloud of thick black smoke. Some smolder clouds appear sourceless. Others must be exhaled by the creator. A cloud shields the hunter from all mortal perception and from most supernatural awareness. Sight, smell, all heat perception and most hearing is baffled. If your character fires a shotgun from concealment within a smolder cloud, the sound of the shot is about as loud as a finger snap.

System: It takes one action to use this edge. Roll Manipulation + Zeal, difficulty 7. The cloud fills a roughly 10-cubic-foot area. For each Conviction point spent, this area increases by another 10 cubic feet (multiple uses of Smolder achieve the same effect, if time permits). Your character can also choose to create a smaller cloud, if she desires, at no Conviction expense. The cloud lasts for one turn for each success achieved in the creation roll, but can be dissipated prematurely if your character desires.

The difficulties of all attack rolls within and into the cloud increase by three. The creator and any other hunters can see through the cloud normally if second sight is active. The Storyteller decides if any supernaturals' particularly applicable senses can pierce the cloud (difficulty 7 if any roll is allowed); most cannot, not even those of many spirits.

•••• Surge

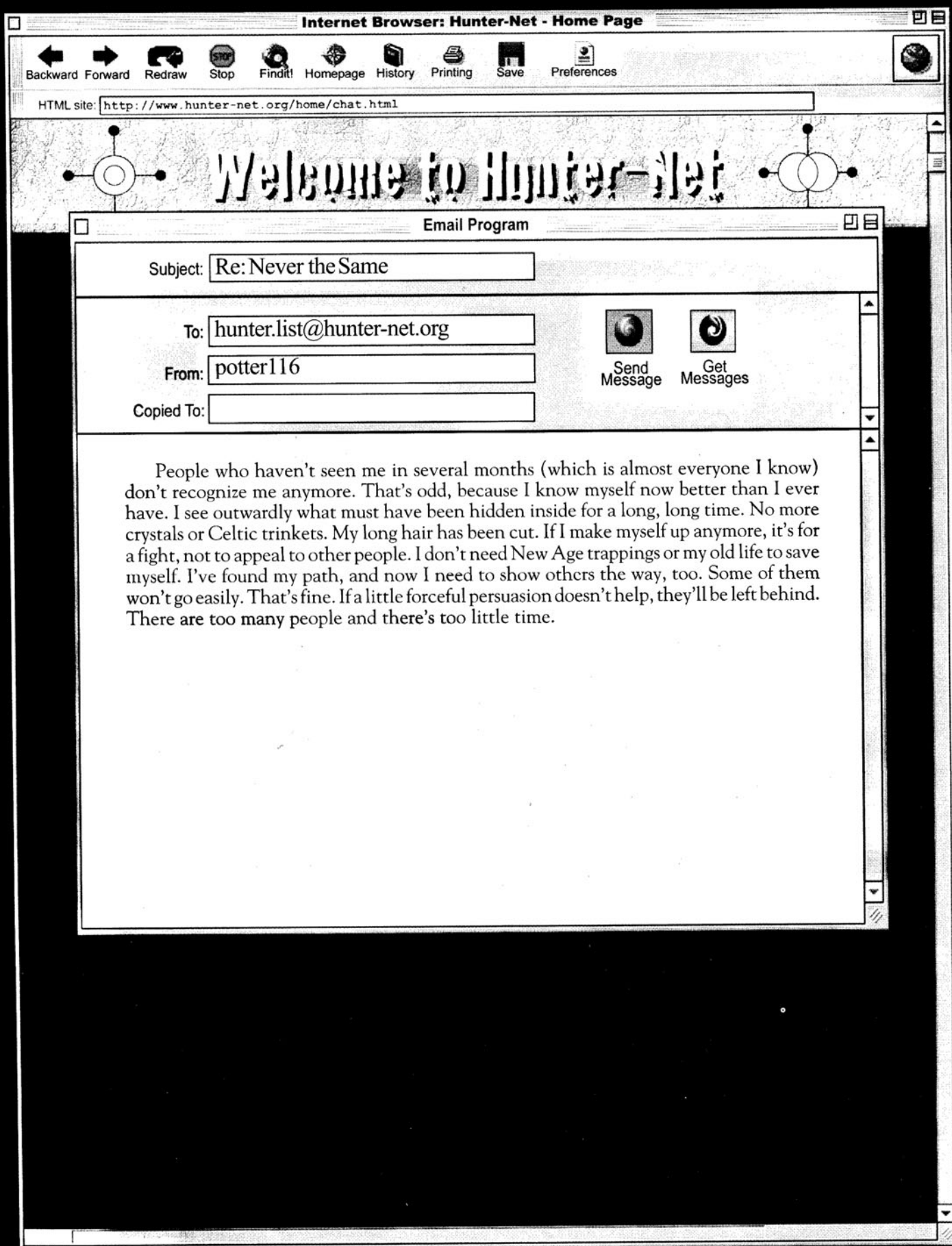
A character who uses Surge feels a tingling sensation course through his limbs. With but a thought, this sensation can be directed to different body parts. It can be poured into muscles and used for extraordinary bursts of strength, channeled through the nerves for remarkable speed, or shunted into the bones and skin to absorb damage.

System: Spend a point of Conviction. You now have a pool of points equal to your character's Zeal to allocate on a one-for-one basis to his Strength, Dexterity and/ or Stamina. No Attribute may be raised higher than 6, and any excess points are wasted. Attributes remain inflated for the remainder of the scene. Because there are no rolls involved directly with this edge, Conviction points cannot be *risked* on its use.

••••• Smite

The faithful like to call this effect "the Wrath of God." Your character gestures, and something that's not quite lightning and not quite fire erupts from her body and (usually) incinerates whatever she's pissed at. Smite is not subtle: It produces a blazing light, a deafening crash and an acrid ammonia stench. Electronic equipment within 20 feet is usually scrambled, glass breaks, metal surfaces are discolored and people nearby often suffer nose bleeds.

System: Spend a point of Conviction. Roll Dexterity + Zeal, difficulty 6. Any successes achieved after the first are added to Strength and rolled in a lethal damage pool. Maximum range equals your character's Zeal score in yards. Supernatural and human targets can be damaged.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Welcome to Hunter-Net
Email Program
Subject: Re: Never the Same
To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org
From: potter116
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Get Messages
People who haven't seen me in several months (which is almost everyone I know) don't recognize me anymore. That's odd, because I know myself now better than I ever have. I see outwardly what must have been hidden inside for a long, long time. No more crystals or Celtic trinkets. My long hair has been cut. If I make myself up anymore, it's for a fight, not to appeal to other people. I don't need New Age trappings or my old life to save myself. I've found my path, and now I need to show others the way, too. Some of them won't go easily. That's fine. If a little forceful persuasion doesn't help, they'll be left behind. There are too many people and there's too little time.

CHAPTER 6: LAWS OF THE HUNT (RULES)

And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible.

— Jeremiah 15:21

All games have rules. In most games, rules delineate the boundaries of fairness, define cheating and ensure that everyone starts on equal footing. In a storytelling game such as this one, rules take a back seat to the story, but they still have a very important role. Rules give structure to your game and allow your Storyteller an unbiased method of determining the outcome of character actions in those situations where fairness is a factor. Your Storyteller can also fall back on the rules and have you and your fellow players roll dice to add randomness to your story's events. The dice, in this case, represent fate. Sometimes things just don't work out as planned. Fate's fickle finger touches your story through rolls of the dice.

Hunter: The Reckoning rules, presented in this chapter, help you coordinate combat scenes as well as any number of other situations that might occur in your game. Offered as a guideline only, they're as flexible as you want to make them. In the end, your Storyteller has the final say in all things. He uses the rules like a tool, to tweak here, to snip there, always with the progression and benefit of the story in mind. Some Storytellers use the rules to the letter, with strict and regular application. Others forego the rules entirely and guide the story interpretively. Both methods are valid; most storytelling approaches fall somewhere between these two extremes. The game is yours to do with as you please.

The Basics

Time

Time flies when you're having fun, or so they say. In a storytelling game, time not only flies, it slows, crawls and warps. During the course of your game, you'll find that time does some strange things. How you control the passage of time affects the smoothness of play. You and your players imagine events as they transpire, talking them out and rolling results. Thus, real time and your game's imaginary time differ. When your characters enter combat, it may take real-time minutes to roleplay mere seconds of game time. Alternately, you may wish to cover *weeks* of game time in just a few real-time minutes, assuming nothing worthy of attention occurs in that period. As in a novel, the authors of the story — you and your players — can gloss over intervals between important events or slow the progression to a crawl when detailing critical moments.

Six basic units describe the passage of time in **Hunter**. Like puzzle pieces, these small units combine to form larger images until you can see the big picture

• Turn — The smallest increment, and often the most important, a turn ranges anywhere from three seconds to three minutes, depending on the pace of events. It's the amount of time it takes a character to perform one action. When your Storyteller announces that play is measured in turns, he determines the length of time that passes during those turns, and it's crucial that he hold everyone to the same standard. To have one character live through three minutes in a turn while another lives through only three seconds makes no sense. The length of a turn can vary between events; however it must remain constant for all at any one particular moment.

• Scene — A scene in a roleplaying game resembles a scene in a theatrical play. Your Storyteller sets the stage, and the players take their roles. The scene evolves in one location and usually encompasses a single, specific event. The flow of time within a scene may vary greatly. It may be played out in turns, it may run parallel to real time, or your Storyteller and fellow players may choose to fast-forward through parts of it, so long as the location and the general events do not change.

For example, a scene may begin with combat, which is measured in turns. It may then slip back into real time as your characters discuss what to do with the bodies of the monstrosities they just killed. After a fast-forward through loading the bodies onto a truck, the scene may return to real time as your characters argue over who will drive. All events occur in the same scene, at the same location, but time warps throughout to focus on the fun and important parts. Your Storyteller determines when one scene ends and another begins.

• Chapter — For the most part, a chapter represents one game session. From the moment you sit down and assume your role to the moment you pack up your dice, you play out a chapter in the story. Your Storyteller has specific challenges planned for the night's episode. The end of each chapter should leave you wanting more, asking questions, and with a sense of the session's relative completion.

• Story — A story tells one entire tale, whether it comprises several chapters or is completed in a single session. It has an introduction, a plot arc that involves rising conflict, and a climax that brings events to a conclusion.

• Chronicle — In the big picture, the term "chronicle" refers to a collection of stories, a saga. Your Storyteller has a goal in mind for the chronicle, a possible destination for your characters, a theme or overarching plot line that connects all chapters of the proverbial novel together. As your game progresses, you and your fellow players write your chronicle, linking parts and pieces together and developing a full-blown epic.

• Downtime — When your Storyteller decides to fast-forward and skim over a period of time, he invokes "downtime." You may summarize events that transpire during downtime, but you do not actually play them out. Your Storyteller may say something like, "Okay, you spend the night in the warehouse. At dawn, voices in the alley outside awaken you." Nothing happened while your characters slept, so there's no reason to play it out. Your Storyteller leaps ahead to the next interesting event.

Simple Actions

You play your character by describing the things he does, the "actions" he performs. These activities may be as simple as looking at something or as complex as flying a helicopter. Depending on the challenge of the action, your Storyteller may request that you roll dice to determine whether your character succeeds. In **Hunter**, a single action that occurs in one turn is called a simple action. Other types of actions are described below. In most instances, your character's actions succeed automatically by virtue of their ease. For example, speaking is not normally challenging. However, if another character intimidates yours into silence, a die roll may decide whether your character perseveres to speak his mind.

Reflexives

Certain feats that your character attempts do not count as *actions* and thus do not take up an entire turn. These "free actions," called reflexives, occur instantly and require no thought or direction from your character. Examples may include using Conviction (hunters' vigor for their war) to perceive the supernatural, risking Conviction in an edge roll, spending Willpower (to ensure that an attempted action succeeds, no matter what) or soaking damage (to ignore or avoid wounds). Reflexives do not interfere with your character's regular action that turn. Their instantaneous, instinctual and autonomous nature makes them occur even though other activities occupy your character's attention.

Rolling Dice

Your Storyteller has two options when deciding the outcome of your character's proposed action: (1) He can simply make the call himself, announcing the outcome that he feels enriches the game, or (2) he can request that you roll appropriate dice to determine the course of events randomly.

Hunter uses 10-sided dice that you can purchase in any game store. Each player needs about 10 of these dice, while your Storyteller needs more.

Ratings

As explained in Chapter 4, you begin to describe your character by distributing points to his Traits. These point values represent your character's innate abilities, learned aptitudes and life experience. Your character has certain strengths and weaknesses, just like a real person. Your character may be a crack shot with a rifle or he may not know one end of a gun from the other. You assign a point value from zero to five to each of your character's Traits, based on the following scale:

none	Abysmal
•	Poor
••	Average
•••	Good
••••	Exceptional
•••••	Superb

Using Abilities as an example, no points (dots) in a Trait means that your character has never learned that particular Skill, Talent or Knowledge. One dot represents a basic understanding of it. Two means your character falls into the average human range in his grasp of the ability. With three to five dots, your character surpasses the average human being and is said to have honed the ability to good, exceptional or superb degrees.

Your character's Trait ratings determine how many dice you roll when your character attempts actions related to those Traits. The Storyteller decides which Traits apply to a proposed action. He announces these Traits and you roll one 10-sided die for each dot you have assigned to those Traits. The number of dice that you roll is called your dice pool. The number of dice in your pool varies based on the nature of the action and the applicable Traits.

A dice pool typically consists of a number of dice equal to your character's relevant Attribute rating (a measure of strength, intelligence or charm), plus that of an appropriate Ability. That is, you use both your character's innate Attributes and learned Abilities to determine how well she succeeds at the attempted action. For simplicity and game balance, your Storyteller should never allow you to combine more than one Attribute or Ability in a dice pool.

Example: Pauline states that her character, Kara, attempts to punch her opponent. The Storyteller decides that Kara's Dexterity Attribute and Brawl Ability apply to the situation. Pauline adds up the dots she has in Dexterity and Brawl, picks up that number of dice and rolls versus a difficulty determined by the Storyteller (see Difficulties, below).

If your character has no dots in an applicable Ability (Talents, Skills or Knowledges), your Storyteller may allow you a dice pool equal to your score in the Attribute relevant to the action attempted. Your character's innate Attribute still offers you a chance to succeed, albeit a small one. The Storyteller determines which Attribute Trait applies to a specific action, and he may increase the difficulty number (see Difficulties, below) by one to represent the increased challenge. However, your Storyteller is not obligated to let you roll an Attribute score alone if it doesn't make sense in the situation.

Example: Pauline wants Kara to attempt to charm a policeman into not issuing her a speeding ticket. Kara has no points in Subterfuge, but the Storyteller may allow Pauline to roll a dice pool equal to Charisma only. In this case, Kara's natural Charisma applies to the situation, even though she has no special talent for talking her way out of trouble.

Now, if Kara wanted to perform surgery on someone but didn't have the Medicine Ability, the action could not be attempted at all.

Some Traits, such as Willpower, have maximum ratings of 10, which is higher than Ability or Attribute Traits can be. Your Storyteller should not usually combine these special Traits with others to produce your dice pools. For the most part, these high-rated Traits stand alone. The exception for a hunter is your character's Virtue Traits — his Zeal, Mercy and Vision. Your character's Virtue ratings are often combined with Attributes to form dice pools when using hunter edges, the powers of the imbued.

Other Traits, such as certain Backgrounds (see Chapter 4) replace Abilities in a dice pool to add variety to Trait use. Your Storyteller always decides when you roll and which Traits form such a dice pool.

Difficulties

When you roll your dice pool, you need a target, a difficulty number that you have to meet or beat. This number ranges from 2 to 10. Your Storyteller determines this number for you. Once you know your difficulty number, you roll your dice pool and each die that matches or exceeds the difficulty number gives you one success. The number of successes you roll tells you how well your character completes the attempted action. You need only one success to pull off a task minimally. The more successes you roll, the more easily and completely your character triumphs.

Example: Pauline states that she wants to have Kara attempt to pick the lock to an apartment, the home of a suspected vampire pawn. Pauline's Storyteller advises her to gather a dice pool representing the number of dots she has in the Intelligence

Attribute and the Security Ability, and to roll them versus a difficulty of 6. Pauline adds her total dots and rolls her pool of six dice. She gets 2, 4, 6, 7, 7 and 9. Pauline achieves four successes. Kara manages to break into the apartment quite easily.

The default difficulty of any task is 6. Obviously, lesser difficulties make a task easier; higher ones make a task harder. Any time this rulebook or your Storyteller fails to give you a difficulty number, assume it to be the average, 6.

Your Storyteller has the final say on difficulty numbers. He determines whether the attempted action is nearly impossible or impossibly easy, based on the situation. A difficulty number of 10 represents an almost insurmountable challenge — you have an equal chance of botching (see below) as you do of succeeding. On the other hand, a difficulty of 2 represents a task so easy that your character barely has to think about it to accomplish it, and it isn't even worth rolling. These extremes should be rare. Difficulty numbers fall in the 3 to 9 range most of the time. Many modifiers and situational factors may play into this decision.

Ultimately, a result of 10 is always a success, no matter the difficulty number.

Successes, Failures and Botches

There's a catch to counting your successes in **Hunter**. Isn't there always a catch? You don't get to keep them all. Any "1s" that you roll must be subtracted from your total number of successes. It doesn't matter how many successes you roll, if you roll enough "1s" to cancel them out, your character fails the attempted action. If you roll no successes at all, but roll at least one "1," the result is a botch (see below), and that's a very bad thing. Storytellers love botches; players hate them.

Example: Kara has just learned the hard way that the world is home to horrific affronts to nature and sanity. Now, she desperately waves a hastily grabbed board in the face of a monstrosity that, by all rights, should be dead. Pauline announces that Kara attempts to hide her terror and, with luck, drive the thing away.

The Storyteller asks for a Manipulation + Intimidation roll with a difficulty number of 6. Kara has two dots in Manipulation and two more in Intimidation. Pauline rolls her four-die pool and gets 1, 4, 6 and 8: two successes. However, she also rolls a "1." It cancels out one of her successes, leaving her with a total of one success. Kara marginally succeeds at her attempted action. The Storyteller describes how the zombie narrows its eyes at Kara, appears frustrated at choosing a difficult mark and shambles away. Pursuit does not even occur to Kara, who nearly collapses with fear.

Failures

It's a shame when it happens, but it does happen. You either roll no successes or roll more "1s" than successes. If either occurs, your character fails his attempted action. Quite simply, he blows it. His shot misses, he can't figure out what is wrong with the car engine, or he turns onto a dead-end street and screws up his attempt to outrun the cops. Whatever the case, a failure may disappoint, but it doesn't hold the same catastrophic potential as a botch (see below).

Example: Kara overhears a conversation among what seem to be street people. Normally, the odd word about eating would be understandable, but "feeding on blood?" She wants to sneak closer to hear better.

The Storyteller asks Pauline to roll Dexterity + Stealth, difficulty 6. Pauline rolls her dice pool: 2, 2, 4, 4 and 5. No successes. The Storyteller describes how, as Kara approaches the window, old boards at her feet groan slightly. The sound doesn't seem audible enough to alert the strangers, but Kara doesn't want to take another step for fear of making more noise. She halts her attempt at silent approach.

Botches

If a failure hurts, then a botch tortures. If you roll even a single "1" but no successes, you botch and bad things happen to your character. A failure simply means that your character does not accomplish his attempted action, but nothing truly horrid occurs. A botch takes that one step further. Not only does your character fail his attempted action, his life gets a lot more complicated.

Your Storyteller decides what results from a botch. The possibilities are endless. In most situations, a catastrophe occurs. If you botch while your character attempts to shoot a gun, the weapon may jam. If you botch while your character jumps from one roof to another, he may fall. Simply failing these rolls might mean that your character misses the shot or barely latches onto the far roof by his fingertips. Degree of

Difficulties

3	Easy — running on flat pavement
4	Routine — finding a number in the phone book
5	Straightforward — telling a little white lie to a stranger
6	Standard — firing a gun, highway driving, tracking
7	Challenging — driving in city traffic
8	Difficult — driving in a car chase
9	Extremely difficult — maneuvering a U-turn at 60 mph

Degrees of Success

One Success	Marginal — good enough for now
Two Successes	Moderate — you did okay
Three Successes	Complete — task accomplished perfectly
Four Successes	Exceptional — you get a bonus
Five+ Successes	Phenomenal — nobody does it better

danger differentiates between a failure and a botch. A failure usually results in a mild threat, whereas a botch lands your character in deep trouble.

Botches allow the Storyteller to create odd but interesting consequences for your abysmal failure. Instead of making your gun jam, the Storyteller may decide that the bullet ricochets off a brick wall and hits an innocent bystander. Instead of leaving your character dangling precariously from the roof, the Storyteller might let him cross — only to find himself the middle of a Mafia execution!

Botches don't necessarily mean your character has to die, only that fate has thrown a gigantic monkey wrench into the works. A clever Storyteller uses a botch to raise tension a notch and introduce new opponents or provide impetus for character development. How would your character come to terms with shooting an innocent child accidentally? Botches make for good drama.

Example: Kara has always had an overactive imagination and an overconfident attitude. Standing on a bridge that overlooks the river, she sees a hulking figure drag a little girl into the cabin of a boat. Pauline announces that Kara attempts to jump from the bridge onto the deck of the boat as it passes beneath her. The Storyteller asks Pauline to roll Dexterity + Athletics, difficulty 6. Kara has 3 Dexterity and 1 Athletics. Pauline rolls: 1, 3, 3 and 5. She achieves no successes and one "1." She botches.

The Storyteller describes how Kara climbs over the railing and prepares to jump. As the boat passes beneath, she slips and falls to the deck, where she lies stunned and immobile. The hideous figure looms above her, laughing at her pathetic display. It raises a gaff into the air and swings it at her head.

Automatic Successes

Who wants to spend the entire game rolling dice? They detract from the game's flow and turn player attention from story to rules. **Hunter** therefore offers a quick and easy method for determining success without rolling dice. In situations where your dice pool exceeds the difficulty number of the attempted action, the feat succeeds automatically. You succeed only marginally, though, the equivalent of rolling one success. If you want greater success, you have to roll, but risk failing or even botching. You cannot get automatic successes during combat or stressful scenes; you have to roll. Automatic successes apply primarily to situations where the attempted action could be accomplished easily, without resistance.

There's also another way to get an automatic success on a roll: Simply spend a Willpower point (p. 125). You can do this only once per turn, and since you have a limited supply of Willpower you can't do it too often, but it can certainly help when you're under pressure to succeed.

Multiple Actions

Your character has to act fast. Can he do two things at once? That remains to be seen, but he can certainly try. Let's say your character needs to dodge around a corner while shooting at the "corpse" in pursuit — two actions, one turn. Both actions suffer from the attempt to perform them simultaneously.

In order to attempt multiple actions, announce all the things you want your character to do and the order in which you will roll them. Your character can attempt as many feats as you want him to try, though the more he divides his attention, the less chance he has of succeeding at any of them. Use an appropriate dice pool for this first action. From it, however, remove a number of dice equal to the total number of actions you want your character to attempt this turn (two if she's trying two actions, three if she's attempting three actions). Then, roll the first attempted action from the reduced dice pool.

Once you have determined the outcome of the first action, prepare to roll the second. Take the appropriate dice pool, remove a number of dice equal to the total number of actions attempted, as before, but also remove one more die. For each consecutive action after the second, continue to remove an additional die, cumulatively, from the pool. Thus, the third action loses two extra dice; the fourth action loses three dice, and so on. If your dice pool is reduced to zero, you cannot attempt that action.

Example: Pauline wants Kara to attempt a drive-by shooting. Kara must not only fire her weapon, but she must also keep her car on the road. To complicate matters, someone shoots back at her and she wants to dodge by ducking down in her car. Three actions. Pauline decides that Kara would give most of her attention to driving, then shooting, then dodging.

Pauline's Storyteller determines that Wits + Drive make up Pauline's dice pool for the first action. Kara has 3 Wits and 2 Drive. Pauline's primary dice pool consists of five dice. She removes three dice because Kara attempts three separate actions in one turn. Pauline rolls two dice to control the car.

For the second action, Pauline's Storyteller calls for a Wits + Firearms roll. Kara has 3 Wits and 3 Firearms. Pauline's primary dice pool contains six dice. Three dice are removed because Kara attempts three separate actions in the same turn. She also loses one extra die, because this is the second of those actions. Pauline now has a dice pool of two.

On the last action, the Storyteller announces that Pauline's primary dice pool consists of Dexterity + Dodge. Kara has 3 Dexterity and 4 Dodge. There are seven dice in Pauline's initial pool. Three are removed because Kara attempts three separate actions. Two more are removed because this is the third of those actions. Pauline once again rolls two dice.

Conviction

Exclusive to hunters, your character's Conviction score represents her determination, passion and vigor in the fight against *that which should not exist*. You establish your character's Conviction rating during character creation. Once per scene, you may risk any or all of your character's Conviction points, thus adding a number of dice to a dice pool equal to the number of Conviction points you wager.

The limitation here is that Conviction is spent to increase dice pools when hunter edges are used. Conviction cannot be used like Willpower to gain an automatic success, nor does it add extra dice to "mundane" actions such as jumping, researching, driving or shooting. Conviction can be used to increase edge dice pools only.

For a more detailed explanation of Conviction, see p. 132.

Trying It Again

Persistence often pays off, but prolonged failure can result in frustration, fatigue and diminished self-confidence. When your character fails an attempted action, the Storyteller may choose to let her try again.

In most situations, the task gets more difficult with each successive attempt after a failure. To represent these diminishing returns, the Storyteller increases the difficulty number for each subsequent attempt by one, cumulatively. The more your character fails and keeps trying, the more difficult the task becomes. Barring in-game time constraints, your character may keep trying for as long as the Storyteller allows.

However, continued failure eventually renders the task impossible. The difficulty number gets so high that the chance of success is eliminated, and your character ends up beating his head against the proverbial wall. If you botch, the Storyteller might not allow your character to continue trying and may even rule that he ruins his tools permanently, loses the evidence irrevocably or destroys the object completely.

The nature of the action determines whether this rule applies. It might if your character attempts to pick a lock, persuade someone of something, parallel park, research a topic at the library or wriggle free of ropes that bind her. It does not apply if your character fails an attempt to shoot someone, to detect an ambush, to catch a baseball, to notice a clue or to do anything else at which she has only one chance to succeed.

Example: Kara manages to break into the office of a suspect businessman. She turns on his computer and weeds through files to search for the names and addresses of the firm's associates. The Storyteller requests that Pauline roll Intelligence + Computer, difficulty 6. Pauline rolls and gets a failure.

The Storyteller allows Kara to keep trying, as she has all night to rifle through the computer. However, the Storyteller adds one to the difficulty number of the second attempt. Pauline has to meet or beat a 7. She fails again.

Kara becomes tired and frustrated, but keeps at it. On the third attempt, the Storyteller raises the stakes and tells Pauline

she must now roll versus a difficulty of 8. The longer Kara persists without success, the more careless she becomes. She begins to think the information probably isn't even in the computer and tires of looking through the files. Her chances of success gradually diminish.

Complications

The basic rules, described above, are all that you need to begin play. Everything hereafter clarifies and expands on those rules by offering more in-depth methods of dealing with specific situations. The following three sections describe general approaches to complex situations that might arise. For plenty of situation-specific complications, see Chapter 7.

Extended Actions

At some point, your character may attempt an action that requires prolonged success, such as climbing a cliff or tracking a feral creature through the woods. A single die roll doesn't do the task justice. Even though your character may succeed partially, that doesn't mean he's able to reach his ultimate goal. That's where the extended actions rules come in. Compared to a *simple action*, which requires only one success to achieve, an *extended action* requires multiple successes for a marginal victory. It may require you to roll multiple times, as well.

When your character attempts an extended action, the Storyteller decides how many successes must be rolled for marginal success. You then roll once for each applicable period of time that passes, as determined by the Storyteller, until you have accumulated enough successes to accomplish the task. This method not only determines whether your character succeeds, it establishes how long it takes to complete the attempted action. Your Storyteller may call for a roll for each in-game turn, hour or even day that passes. The time factor depends upon the nature of the task. It is discretionary, based on how long the task might take under normal circumstances.

Example: Kara tries to repair her motorcycle. The Storyteller announces that the action requires a total of 12 successes from start to finish. Pauline rolls once per in-game hour that passes, accumulating her successes until she's rolled 12 total. She gets three successes in the first hour. Four in the second. Two in the third. She fails in the fourth hour and adds nothing to her total. In the fifth hour, she rolls two. And, finally, in the sixth, she rolls three more. It takes Kara six hours to repair her engine.

In most cases your character keeps trying for as long as you like, though you may play a harried game of beat-the-clock. Time may be short; the sun may set in only a few hours. If your character takes a break from his task to accomplish something else, the Storyteller may decide that some of the successes gained are lost because your character has to reorient herself. You may even have to start counting from scratch again.

The more times you have to roll, the greater the chance that you might botch and your character bungles the attempt completely. On a botch, the Storyteller may decide that you cannot start again; your character simply fails, he destroys his equipment or catastrophe strikes.

Example of Extended Action

Biologist Jeremy Hodge tries to find the antidote to a strange poison that's killing his friend Tamra. The Storyteller has several decisions to make. He rules that Jeremy's player, Travis, must roll Intelligence + Medicine against a difficulty of 7. He then decides that Travis must accumulate a total of 10 successes. Finally, though he keeps the information to himself, the Storyteller establishes that Tamra has only four days to live, and that Travis may roll only once for every in-game day.

Travis has 4 Intelligence and 4 Medicine, for a dice pool of eight. He gets three successes on his first roll. His research starts well and he has high hopes for saving Tamra.

On the second night, Travis rolls a whopping five successes, giving him a total of eight. The Storyteller announces that Tamra's condition worsens, but that Jeremy's experiments seem to be going well.

On the third night, Travis fails, rolling no successes. He consoles himself and Tamra's player with the fact that it's not a botch, but Jeremy's progress falters nonetheless. The Storyteller describes how Tamra has slipped into critical condition.

On the fourth night, Travis rolls again, counting his successes. He scores three, giving him a total of 11 successes. The Storyteller describes how Jeremy administers the antidote and just barely manages to save Tamra's life... such as it is for a hunter.

Resisted Actions

Sometimes, your character's actions are resisted by someone who wants to keep him from accomplishing his goals. When two characters go head-to-head in this way, a simple dice-pool roll doesn't represent the situation adequately. Called a resisted action, this type of conflict pits the Traits of two characters, as each attempts to overpower the other. As a simplified example, people in a tug-of-war are in a resisted action. You and your opponent roll your dice pools against a common difficulty number, or sometimes against a difficulty equal to an appropriate Trait (or Traits) belonging to the other. The opponent who garners the most successes wins.

When totaling the final result, each of your opponent's successes cancel out one of your own, just as "1s" do. If, for example, you score four successes and your opponent scores three, then you've succeeded but with only one success, indicating a marginal accomplishment. Although your opponent can't stop you this way, he can still put a

kink in your style and slow you down. Gaining an outstanding success on a resisted action rarely occurs.

At times, a combination of resisted and extended rolls may suit the situation. Certain resisted actions — car chases, debates, drinking contests or kick-boxing matches — extend over a period of time and require a series of rolls to determine success. In these cases, you and your opponent both roll several times according to the resisted action rule above, but you add your successes over the course of a number of rolls. The first to reach the total set by the Storyteller prevails.

Sometimes, the Storyteller may forego multiple rolls on what may seem like an extended action if dice rolling threatens to overshadow roleplaying. A single, resisted roll often suffices to determine the final outcome.

Example of Resisted Action

A group of hunters meets in Ramon's apartment to discuss surveying a warehouse where a shambler is believed to be hiding. Ramon has a plan, but Brandon disagrees strongly and has another idea. They debate; a power struggle ensues to see which plan the hunters follow.

The Storyteller tells the two players to roll Manipulation + Leadership versus a difficulty of the other person's dice pool. Ramon has 4 Manipulation and 4 Leadership, for a dice pool of 8, which also becomes Brandon's difficulty number. Brandon has 3 Manipulation and 2 Leadership. His dice pool contains five dice, so Ramon rolls versus a difficulty number of 5.

Ramon's player gets four successes. Brandon's player gets three. Ramon's player wins, but only by a margin of one success. The Storyteller describes how both men have good points, but Ramon convinces the other hunters to follow his lead. His one success means they're skeptical, though.

Teamwork

In certain situations, it makes sense for people to work together to improve chances of success. Teamwork can apply when characters try to lift something heavy, research a particular subject, break down a door, intimidate someone or figure out a puzzle. All players roll their own dice pools and add their successes. You do not, however, add your dice pools together and make one big roll. Each player must roll separately and then you combine all the results. If anyone botches, the entire attempt may fail utterly.

Action	Example/Description
Simple	Throwing a punch, dodging a bullet

A one-shot chance of success or failure; success is determined by a single roll. The Storyteller determines the difficulty and the Traits that form the dice pool. Automatic success is possible.

Extended	Mountain climbing, tracking in woods

Task stretches over a period of time and each stage renews the chance for failure or success. You make several rolls with the goal of collecting a stated number of successes. This procedure increases the chance that you might botch.

Resisted	Pickpocketing or disarming someone

Action pits two characters against each other. Each player rolls versus a common difficulty number, or one based on the opponent's Traits. The two compare successes and the difference between those determines the degree of success.

Extended & Resisted	Tailing someone evasive, wrestling

Using the resisted-action rule, the players roll repeatedly in order to acquire successes. The first to reach the total set by the Storyteller wins.

The Golden Rule

The most important **Hunter** rule to remember is that you control your own game. If a rule doesn't work for you, don't use it or change it to suit your needs. The Storyteller has final say in house rules. Just remember that rules consistency enhances players' enjoyment.

Consider the rules laid out in this book to be a flexible guideline. Every **Hunter** game is different. Some focus entirely on consent, in which all actions and their success or failure are determined by player decision, with the ultimate goal being the richness of the story. Others follow a strict regimen of randomness, with dice used extensively to introduce excitement and tension to the story. You decide which method to use, or whether you walk a path somewhere between.

The Golden Rule is simple: "Play and have fun, above all else."

Try It Out

There you go. You have the basic rules. If you learn the preceding and understand it, you're ready to play. All the rest simply expands on the basics and allows you to customize for particular in-game situations. Give it a try or run through some of the examples below if you want a little practice.

Example 1: Lucas, an ex-ganger turned hunter, searches through garbage bags behind a free clinic where he suspects the doctors have an illicit connection to some kind of blood cult. He tries to spot anything out of the ordinary. As his Storyteller, what do you do?

Answer: Ask Lucas' player, Mark, to roll Intelligence + Alertness against a difficulty number of 6. Lucas has 2 Intelligence and 3 Alertness. Mark rolls five dice, looking for any "6s" or higher, and subtracting any "1s" from the total. The resulting balance represents how well Lucas succeeds or fails. Mark rolls and gets 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7: two preliminary successes minus one for the "1," for a total of one success. Lucas succeeds marginally.

You describe how Lucas searches through the trash, gagging on the smell. He finds very little until he gets to the very bottom, where he finds a piece of paper with a phone number on it. However, a corner of the paper is torn and part of the number is missing.

Example 2: A mysterious and devious opponent has created a bomb that looks like an ordinary mind-teaser puzzle. Boyd and Anna must solve the puzzle in order to defuse the bomb — or they go boom. What happens?

Answer: The Storyteller plays the bomb's manufacturer. His skill resists Anna and Boyd's chances of solving the puzzle, and time is running out. Their effort could therefore be considered a resisted and extended action, and is also accomplished through teamwork. You inform the players that they need a total of 10 successes to solve the puzzle, and that they have three turns in which to do so. They must roll Wits + Demolitions versus a difficulty number of 6.

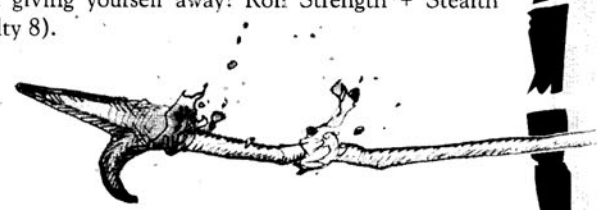
In the first turn, they get a total of six successes between them. However, you also roll for the puzzle-maker, getting three successes. Removing his successes from the players' total, they end up with only three successes that turn. In the second turn, they get a total of five successes. Your puzzler gets two successes, which leaves the players with three that they add to their cumulative score, for a total of six successes overall.

The players begin to sweat; they have to get at least four successes in this last turn to keep the bomb from exploding. In the final turn, Boyd's player fails to roll any successes, but he does not botch. Anna's player rolls a whopping five successes. You roll for the bomb's maker and fail the roll as well. You describe how Anna saves the day by dramatically solving the puzzle when Boyd is stumped. The little red light quits blinking. Boyd and Anna can breathe again.

Examples of Rolls

As your game unfolds, characters will attempt all kinds of actions. The rules systems try to account for most things and are purposely designed to be flexible for your needs. More than 270 combinations of Abilities and Attributes give you an incredible range of options when determining which of them applies to a given situation. You may even want to make up your own Talents, Skills and Knowledges to fit more specific character capabilities. The examples below illustrate the diversity of actions you may encounter in your game.

- You have to remove a fallen tree limb from the road before a pursuing car arrives. Roll Strength + Athletics (difficulty 8).
- The director of an art gallery invites you to a reception. You have to impress him with your style and grace to win his trust. Roll Manipulation + Etiquette (difficulty of the director's Perception + Etiquette).
- You've managed to break into an office building, but the guard will make his rounds any minute. Now, where is that file? Roll Wits + Computer once per turn (difficulty 8). You have five turns before the guard shows up, and you have to gain a total of 12 successes.
- It would really suck if that rotted fucker caught you sneaking around in his hideout. Roll Dexterity + Stealth, resisted by the bastard's Perception + Alertness (difficulties equal opposing dice pools). If you succeed, you get out undetected.
- If you could get elected to the city council, you would be one step closer to the behind-the-scenes powers that control the town. It all hinges on this one speech. Roll Charisma + Expression (difficulty 6).
- You know that crack house is around here somewhere, but it's gonna be tough to find. Make an extended Perception + Streetwise roll (difficulty 7) every five minutes with a target of 10 total successes.
- Twelve more hours to go on this cross-country drive, and you're the only one who can handle the eighteen-wheeler. Roll Stamina + Drive (difficulty 7) for every hour; you need 12 successes to arrive safely at your destination without having to make a lengthy stop.
- You have to distract the crowd while your allies sneak out the back. You get up on the club's stage and proceed to hurl profanities at the mob. Roll Appearance + Performance (difficulty 6).
- That congressman is dirty. You can see it in his decaying face. If you could figure out what all his double-talk means, you could anticipate his *real* political agenda. Roll Intelligence + Politics (difficulty 6).
- Dammit! The gate is closed when you come back. Those twisted dogs are out there sniffing for you, probably smelling your very fear. Can you force the gate back open without giving yourself away? Roll Strength + Stealth (difficulty 8).



• The leader of the gang is dead and someone has to take his place at the meeting tonight. You're "volunteered." Do you come off as a convincing leader? Roll Wits + Subterfuge (difficulty of opponent's Perception + Subterfuge).

• The time for talking has passed. It's time to shoot. Roll Dexterity + Firearms (difficulty 6).

• This deranged scientist has the information you need. Can you trick him into telling you what you want? Roll Manipulation + Science (difficulty 8).

• That dog with the red eyes doesn't look too friendly. Can you make friends? Roll Perception + Animal Ken (difficulty 7).

• You know the answer lies somewhere in this mutilated body. Question is, do you have the will to perform a full autopsy before it's too late? Roll Stamina + Investigation once every hour (difficulty 7) until you gain a total of 15 successes.

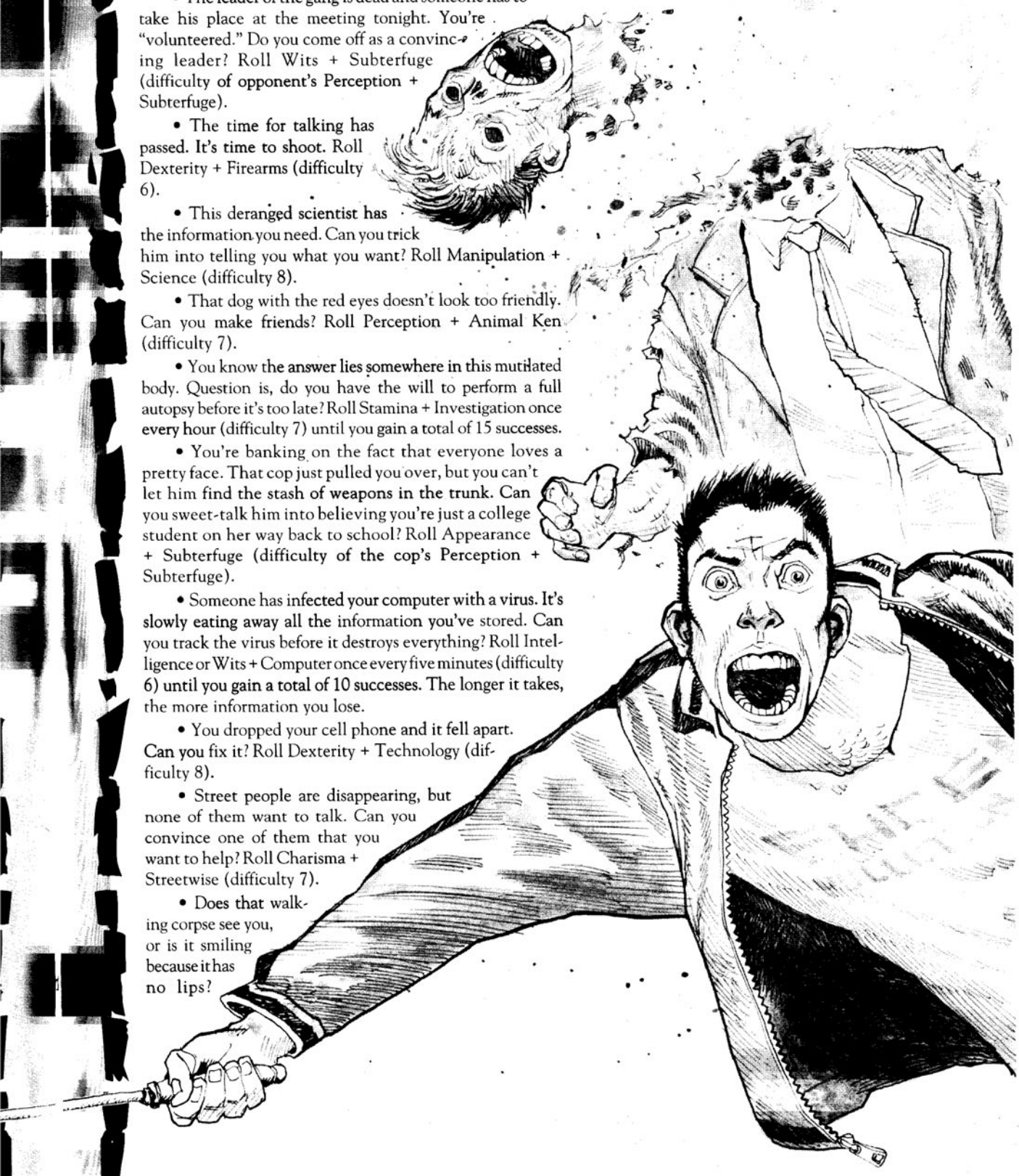
• You're banking on the fact that everyone loves a pretty face. That cop just pulled you over, but you can't let him find the stash of weapons in the trunk. Can you sweet-talk him into believing you're just a college student on her way back to school? Roll Appearance + Subterfuge (difficulty of the cop's Perception + Subterfuge).

• Someone has infected your computer with a virus. It's slowly eating away all the information you've stored. Can you track the virus before it destroys everything? Roll Intelligence or Wits + Computer once every five minutes (difficulty 6) until you gain a total of 10 successes. The longer it takes, the more information you lose.

• You dropped your cell phone and it fell apart. Can you fix it? Roll Dexterity + Technology (difficulty 8).

• Street people are disappearing, but none of them want to talk. Can you convince one of them that you want to help? Roll Charisma + Streetwise (difficulty 7).

• Does that walking corpse see you, or is it smiling because it has no lips?



Roll Wits + Empathy (difficulty 7) to guess at the zombie's intentions.

• You've managed to get a pass into a high-security building. Can you determine what kinds of security systems are used in anticipation of returning uninvited? Roll Perception + Security (difficulty of the security company's Intelligence + Security).

Game Terms

Words, words, words. This list defines some of the terms used in this book, especially in the rules.

• **Ability:** A type of Trait to which you assign point values when creating your character, and which determines how many dice you roll. Ability Traits represent things for which your character has a natural Talent, as well as Skills and Knowledges he's acquired. Examples include Empathy, Firearms and Medicine.

• **Action:** An action is any single activity or feat undertaken by your character, including loading a gun, driving to the gas station or scrutinizing something. When you describe something your character does or wishes to attempt, that's an action. The length of time it takes to perform different actions varies.

• **Advantages:** This catch-all category includes Backgrounds as well as the more mystical capabilities that hunters possess.

• **Attributes:** A type of Trait to which you assign point values when creating your character, and which determines the dice you roll. Attribute Traits represent your character's innate characteristics, such as how strong (Strength), personable (Charisma) or smart (Intelligence) she is.

• **Background:** A type of Trait chosen at character creation that defines aspects of your character's life not directly related to his Attributes or Abilities. Examples of Backgrounds include who your character knows (Contacts, Allies), how much money he has (Resources), or how famous he is (Fame).

• **Botch:** When you roll absolutely no successes and at least one "1" shows up in the roll, you botch and your character catastrophically fails the attempted action. If there are any successes — even those canceled by "1s" in the roll — it is merely a failure, not a botch. A botch is much worse than a simple failure.

• **Character:** In order to play Hunter, you write up a character, a fictional person whom you then control in the game. Your character has statistics that represent his capabilities, history and personality. Storytellers likewise create fictional characters, who populate the setting and interact with your character.

• **Chronicle:** The grand scheme of your game, its overall picture, a chronicle is any story you build from start to finish with a central element of one city, one set of characters or one main, underlying plot line.

• **Conviction:** A Trait that measures your character's energy for the hunt and for the hunter cause. It is spent and, unlike other Traits, is risked to add dice to your dice pools when using hunter edges (see p. 132).

• **Dice Pool:** The number of dice you roll to determine the success or failure of your character's action. Relevant Traits dictate this number, plus or minus any modifiers. Your Storyteller tells you which Traits apply.

• **Difficulty Number:** A value, assigned by the Storyteller, that a player must equal or beat on each die rolled to achieve successes toward an action. Certain modifiers may affect an action's difficulty number.

• **Downtime:** An imaginary period during the course of the game when nothing of significance happens. Players can skim over the events that occur during downtime and fast-forward to the next important event.

• **Experience Points:** Through the course of the game, your character earns experience points, which you spend to increase his Traits. Experience points represent training, study and honing of capabilities. See p. 140 for more on experience points.

• **Extended Action:** This type of action requires that you accumulate a certain number of successes over a series of rolls and a period of time.

• **Failure:** If you roll no successes and no "1s," or enough "1s" to cancel out all your successes, your character fails his attempted action. A failure, unlike a botch, simply means your character has not succeeded, and nothing extremely catastrophic occurs.

• **Health:** This indicator, which represents how wounded your character is, modifies your dice pools.

• **Points:** Certain Traits, such as Willpower, rise and fall temporarily throughout the course of play. In order to differentiate between your character's permanent score and his current level in a Trait, we call the permanent value the Trait *rating*, and the current value the *points* or *pool*. Mark permanent rating in the round dots on your character sheet and mark current level of points in the boxes.

Conviction also rises and falls throughout a game as points are risked or spent. However, there's no such thing as a Conviction *rating*. Your character's current score is his pool.

• **Rating:** Whereas *points* represent the temporary score of certain Traits, the term "rating" refers to the permanent value of those Traits. This designation applies to such Traits as Willpower.

• **Reflexive:** A situation in which dice might be rolled, but that does not count as an action for the purposes of calculating dice pools. Examples of reflexive

rolls include soak rolls, Willpower rolls and spending or risking Conviction.

• **Resisted Action:** When another character opposes your character's attempted action, he creates a situation called a resisted action. You both roll and compare the number of successes gained. The one with more successes wins.

• **Scene:** A period of action usually set in one location and a particular time frame. A scene is often broken up into turns, though not always.

• **Simple Action:** An action that requires only one success to accomplish and that usually involves only one player. More successes indicate a higher level of achievement.

• **Story:** The combination of several interconnected scenes. A story is usually characterized by an introduction, conflict, climax and resolution.

• **Storyteller:** One of the players in a roleplaying game takes the responsibility for creating the fictional environment and guiding the story. You describe the setting, make decisions regarding rules and assume the roles of the main characters' friends and enemies. You oversee the game and are the final judge on all rules calls.

• **Success:** Any die roll that equals or exceeds the stated difficulty number.

• **System:** Any specific set of rules used in a certain situation for guiding the roll of dice to simulate dramatic actions.

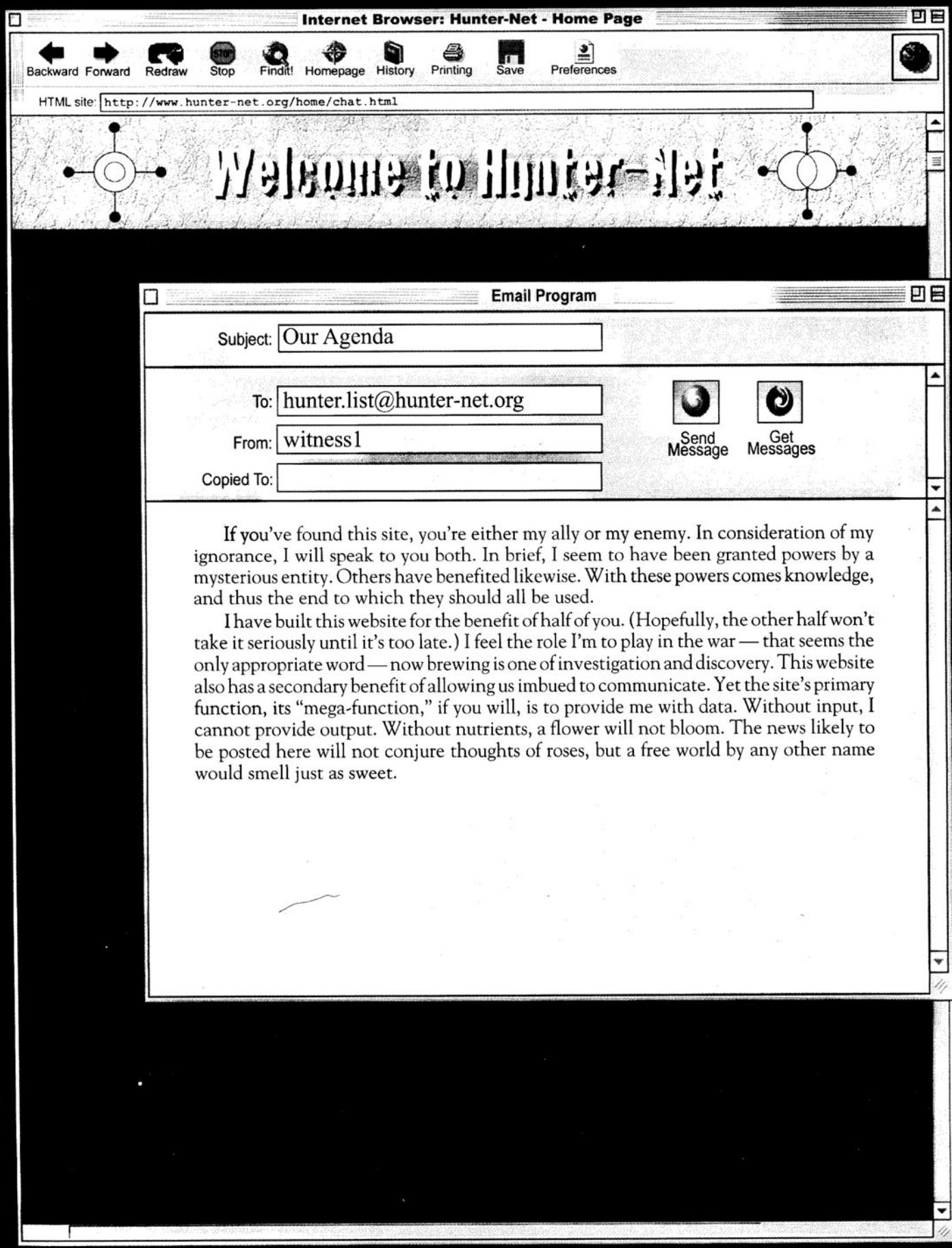
• **Trait:** During character creation, you assign point values to varying descriptive elements. These qualities, called Traits, define your character's learned abilities, innate attributes and worldly means.

• **Troupe:** Your group of players, including your Storyteller.

• **Turn:** An increment of time from three seconds to three minutes in duration used to resolve complex actions and events. A turn is roughly the time it takes your character to perform one action, and it should be kept consistent for all characters in the scene.

• **Virtue Traits:** At character creation, you assign point values to the three Virtues (Zeal, Mercy and Vision). These Traits reflect your character's goals in the hunt.

• **Willpower:** A measure of your character's self-confidence and internal control. Willpower works differently than most Traits — it is often spent rather than rolled.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If you've found this site, you're either my ally or my enemy. In consideration of my ignorance, I will speak to you both. In brief, I seem to have been granted powers by a mysterious entity. Others have benefited likewise. With these powers comes knowledge, and thus the end to which they should all be used.
I have built this website for the benefit of half of you. (Hopefully, the other half won't take it seriously until it's too late.) I feel the role I'm to play in the war — that seems the only appropriate word — now brewing is one of investigation and discovery. This website also has a secondary benefit of allowing us imbued to communicate. Yet the site's primary function, its "mega-function," if you will, is to provide me with data. Without input, I cannot provide output. Without nutrients, a flower will not bloom. The news likely to be posted here will not conjure thoughts of roses, but a free world by any other name would smell just as sweet.

CHAPTER 7: TOOLS OF THE HUNT (SYSTEMS)

And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.
— Genesis 42:12

Hunter: The Reckoning focuses on roleplay and story development. Although dice take us out of the story and remind us it's just a game, they can also help develop the story. Dice rolling brings random chance into the mix and represents the effects of character strengths and weaknesses. Although most people choose to minimize dice-rolling as much as possible, certain situations may call for it. This chapter covers a number of specific dice mechanics, including general dramatic systems, combat, injury and recovery.

The systems here provide a foundation for covering some of the possible situations that might arise in your game. Written for ease of play, they allow you to return to the story as quickly as possible. If you have alternatives for these systems that work better, use them instead. Furthermore, if a player attempts a particularly clever or inspired approach to a problem, the Storyteller may award an automatic success rather than roll dice.

Dramatic Systems

Your story unfolds through the actions and interactions of the characters. One of the Storyteller's jobs is keeping events organized, guiding the characters' actions so that they remain logical in both order and time, and describing the imaginary consequences of those actions. The Storyteller determines the difficulty of actions and oversees dice rolls to make sure that they represent events accurately.

Many factors may modify dice rolls. Difficulty numbers may change based on the situation. Perhaps your action is opposed directly or your character's mental and physical condition is impaired or heightened. The Attributes and Abilities that form your dice pool may also change according to situational factors. The Storyteller makes a number of decisions when requesting rolls. These may seem overwhelming at first, but the systems provided here help, and they can be mastered quickly. When all else fails, rely on common sense to resolve situations and have fun. Even after the dice have tumbled, characters with a specialty (p. 101) in a particular Ability may roll extra dice if any "10s" turn up.

Attributes and Abilities are typically combined to determine dice pools in the following systems. However, a character might not have an Ability called for. The player can either roll versus the Attribute only (with one point possibly added to difficulty to reflect the increased challenge) or another Ability could be used that also has application to the situation.

Many of these systems involve more than just simple actions; some activities can demand a lot of time and effort. You may try a number of them again if the first attempt is

unsuccessful, although subsequent attempts might impose a difficulty penalty at the Storyteller's discretion (see Trying It Again, p. 171).

Automatic Feats

Unlike reflexives, automatic feats use up your character's actions, but they don't require dice rolls. They take time and demand a moment of your character's attention. However, because of their general ease, rolling dice would be superfluous to determine success. Your character has no trouble accomplishing the following actions under normal circumstances.

• **Getting to Your Feet:** Your character may rise to his feet from the ground or from a seated position without a roll as long as he's not hindered from doing so. In situations where it matters, rising takes one turn and is considered one full action. If your character attempts another action at the same time such as firing a weapon, the multiple-action rule applies (see Multiple Actions, p. 171): Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 4) to stand successfully.

• **Movement:** Your character may choose to walk, jog or run. Simply walking, he moves seven yards in one turn. When jogging, he moves (12 + Dexterity) yards per turn, and when running at full speed he moves (20 + [3 x Dexterity]) yards per turn.

Your character may move up to half maximum running speed and *then* take another action that turn. Although this is not considered a multiple action, the Storyteller may impose a penalty to the action's difficulty number or to your dice pool. On the other hand, if your character moves *while* attempting a second action, such as crossing a room while shooting his crossbow, each yard covered subtracts one from the other action's dice pool.

Injured characters (p. 140) cannot, of course, move at maximum speed.

• **Readying Weapon:** Whether your character draws a knife or reloads his gun, he must spend a turn arming himself. Doing so usually requires no roll, although your Storyteller may request one under certain circumstances. If your character readies his weapon in conjunction with another action, your Storyteller may ask you to reduce your dice pool for the other action (see Multiple Actions, p. 171) and roll Dexterity + Melee or Firearms (difficulty 4) for the readying attempt.

• **Starting Car:** It takes a turn to start a car and certain situations may make this more difficult, thus requiring a dice roll. We've all screamed at the movie screen when someone panics during efforts to start a car to get away from a killer. Invariably, keys get dropped or won't go into the ignition. A Wits + Drive roll (difficulty 4) may come into play. Common sense determines whether a roll is called for.

• **Yielding:** The Initiative rules determine who goes first in a situation (p. 189). However, you may choose to yield your turn to a player or players following you in the order established. Basically, you hold off to let the other character go first. You may still act later, but you reserve action until then. If everyone, including your Storyteller's characters, yield during a turn, no one does anything and time moves forward to the next turn.

Physical Feats

The following systems present options related to the three Physical Attributes (Strength, Dexterity and Stamina). Actions involving these Attributes usually require dice rolls. Difficulty numbers vary based on the situation.

• **Climbing [Dexterity + Athletics]:** Your character may attempt to climb any number of things such as rocky cliffs, steel fences, building façades, fire escapes, dumpsters or trees. In most cases, climbing is best dealt with as an extended action. If the object has available handholds and presents few complications, your character moves 10 feet for every success. Thus, your character could climb into or over a dumpster with only a marginal success. However, it may take several rolls to scale a cliff or climb a fence.

Your Storyteller may adjust this rate based on the difficulty of the climb. For example, she may decide that an easier climb such as a ladder may allow your character to move 15 feet per success, whereas a more difficult climb such as a coconut tree may allow your character to move only one foot per success. Many factors may affect rate of travel, including the number of handholds, the smoothness of the surface or even the weather. In certain situations, a short and difficult climb may present the same challenge as a long and easy one. Your Storyteller has final say in determining all these factors.

As with any extended action, you roll until you have accumulated enough successes. Botching on a climbing roll can prove extremely disastrous, though your character need not necessarily fall to her death. She could get stuck halfway up or she may slip and lose altitude that she has to recover. Or she may fall to serious injury or death.

• **Driving [Dexterity/ Wits + Drive]:** A single dot in the Drive Skill gives your character the ability to drive a basic, manual-transmission car. (All characters of age are assumed to be able to drive an automatic, unless you specify otherwise.) Under normal circumstances you don't have to roll to determine successful driving. However, bad weather, the vehicle's speed, obstacles and complex maneuvers can challenge even the most competent drivers.

The difficulty number of a driving roll increases as conditions become more hazardous. The Storyteller may, for example, increase the difficulty number by one if your character attempts to drive in heavy rain or icy conditions. Speeding in an attempt to lose pursuers may increase the difficulty by two. Factors add up, too. If your character maneuvers in heavy traffic she faces a +1 difficulty. But if your character also has a broken windshield, the Storyteller may make it +2, for a total of +3 difficulty.

If you fail a driving roll, your character is in trouble. You must make another roll to determine whether your character crashes or loses control. A botch usually indicates a major malfunction, a skid out of control or a disastrous collision. If your character has no Drive rating she may still attempt to drive; you may have to roll based on Dexterity or Wits alone at an increased difficulty for every change in course, procedure or speed. Furthermore, if your character has only one dot in Drive she may still attempt to drive a large truck or even a race car, but the Storyteller may ask you to make repeated rolls, as in an extended action, to determine whether she maintains control of the vehicle.

Vehicle Types

Vehicles handle differently. The following chart is a guide to some of the ones your character might attempt to drive. For every 10 mph over the safe speed, increase the difficulty of the roll by one. Bold stunts and bad road conditions may also add to difficulty.

There is a *maximum* number of dice that you may have in your dice pool, as shown below in the Maneuver column. This limit represents the vehicle's limits. A Ferrari handles better than a dump truck, no matter how skilled the driver.

Vehicle	Safe Speed	Max (mph) Speed	Maneuver
Bus	60	100	3
18-Wheeler	70	110	4
6-Wheel Truck	60	90	3
Tank (modern)	60	100	4
Tank (WWII)	30	40	3
Compact	70	130	6
Sporty Compact	100	140	7
Sedan	70	120	5
Luxury Sedan	85	155	7
SUV	70	115	6
Midsize	75	125	6
Minivan	70	120	6
Sport Coupe	110	150	8
Sports Car	110	160	8
Formula-One Racer	140	240	10

• **Encumbrance [Strength]:** A hunter would be a dangerous foe to any night-creature if he could carry anything he needed all the time. Unfortunately, that's unrealistic. Though some players love to weigh their characters down with every weapon, explosive device, electronic doodad and piece of equipment that *might* be needed, the Storyteller can set limits. We are talking about mortal humans, after all.

Your character can realistically carry/ tote 25 pounds per point of Strength without penalty. If she attempts to carry more, every action involving physical exertion incurs an automatic +1 difficulty. Furthermore, every 25 pounds she piles on beyond what she can carry easily reduces her base movement by half. If your character tries to carry double her Strength allocation, she can't move at all. Perhaps she can actually lift it all, but she can't go anywhere with it. Your Storyteller makes the final call on what a character may carry realistically.

• **Intrusion [Dexterity/ Perception + Security]:** Intrusion covers both sides of security-related actions: preventing others from breaching your established defenses, or breaching others' defenses. Sample actions include evading or installing security cameras, cracking or creating codes, lock-picking or making a lock pick-proof, and avoiding or designing laser movement detectors.

When breaching security set by another, your roll must succeed on the first attempt if an active security system is present. Failure to do so may activate alarms, put your character on camera, or set off internal defense systems. If no alarm is present, such as when your character simply attempts to pick a lock to an apartment, your character may continue trying. The difficulty number of an intrusion roll ranges from 5 to 9, depending on whether your character assaults a standard lock or Fort Knox. Certain tasks may require that he have at least one dot in the Security Skill, and possibly more, to have any chance of succeeding. Furthermore, many intrusion attempts require special tools such as lock picks or electronic monitoring devices. On a botch, your character bungles the attempt and is in hot water.

When your character attempts to install a security system, roll only once as a simple action. The more successes you get, the better your character's security system is and the more trouble others have in overcoming it. The Storyteller may add your successes to the base difficulty of any future attempts to breach your system.

• **Jumping [Strength, or Strength + Athletics for a running jump]:** You make simple jump rolls versus a difficulty of 3. Your character manages to jump two feet vertically or four feet horizontally for every success you achieve. If your successes do not add up to at least the distance between your character and her destination, your character fails the attempt and lands short. This could be dangerous if, for example, she attempts to leap a chasm. However, on a failure you may make a Dexterity + Athletics roll (typically difficulty 6) to grab onto a ledge or other protuberance. A botch, however, has far worse repercussions. Your character may be injured seriously or may even fall to her death.

You may attempt a Perception + Athletics roll (difficulty 6) prior to a jump to determine whether your character can gauge the distance. If successful, you learn how many successes you need for the leap. This way, if the jump seems

impossible you know it in advance and you can change plans before it's too late.

• **Lifting/ Breaking [Strength]:** Stories abound of people who have performed amazing feats of strength in emergencies. There's a limit to what your character can lift or break, as shown on the chart below. However, she may manage to exceed her normal ability in extraordinary circumstances. If the Storyteller feels your character has enough adrenaline, drugs or determination running through her veins to allow for super-strength, he can ask you to roll a dice pool equal to your Willpower, difficulty 9. Each success temporarily adds one dot to your character's Strength and moves your character up the chart for the duration of that single action.

Bear in mind that even as your character damages an object, she likely damages herself as well. The human body can take only so much abuse. Your character's body probably gives before a more solid object does, unless she uses a tool such as a crowbar or hammer. She manages to punch through a door, but she also skins her knuckles or breaks bones in the process. Common sense dictates the outcome of such attempts. The more challenging feats on the chart assume the use of a blunt object of some sort.

If your character fails the action, nothing happens. She simply cannot lift or break the object. If you botch the roll, your character may strain a muscle, break bones or drop the item on herself. A botched attempt to lift an object off someone else may end up inflicting further damage.

Several characters can team up to lift or break an object. Individual players roll separately, as per the Teamwork rules (p. 173) and combine their successes. Their combined Strength scores determine the minimum of what they can do without rolling Willpower.

Strength	Feat	Lift
1	Break a window	40 lbs.
2	Break a wooden chair	100 lbs.
3	Break open a wooden crate	250 lbs.
4	Break a 2" x 4" board	400 lbs.
5	Bend open steel chain links	650 lbs.
6	Break a steel fence	800 lbs.
7	Overturn a small car	900 lbs.
8	Bend steel bars	1000 lbs.
9	Break through a cement wall	1200 lbs.
10	Tear free steel rivets	1500 lbs.
11	Bend 1" sheet metal	2000 lbs.
12	Break a metal lamp post	3000 lbs.
13	Overturn a station wagon	4000 lbs.
14	Overturn a van	5000 lbs.
15	Overturn a truck	6000 lbs.

• **Opening/ Closing [Strength]:** In order to have your character break down a door with brute force, you must make a Strength roll (difficulty 6 to 8, depending on the door). Standard wooden doors with basic lock mechanisms require only one success to ram open or slam shut. Breaking down a reinforced door may call for as many as 10 successes, whereas a vault door may take 20 or more. Your Storyteller may deem this an extended action, with your character throwing herself at the door multiple times until it breaks. Any resistance makes this a resisted action, too, and pits characters against each other. A botch may cause a health level of bashing damage to your character's shoulder, may cause your character to give up, or may send her flying as the door suddenly opens — and she stumbles right out the window on the opposite side of the room.

As with most actions, teamwork makes it easier. Particularly solid doors may require a minimum Strength score even to dent. This system also applies to opening or closing other objects such as locked cabinets, boarded windows or coffins.

• **Pursuit [Dexterity + Athletics/ Drive]:** The thrill of the chase doubtless recurs periodically in your game, whether it's the hunter pursuing a target or a supernatural predator turning the tables on the hunter. In many cases, the formulas for calculating movement speed determine the outcome of the chase (see Movement, p. 181); If your character clearly moves faster than the other, she eventually catches up with or escapes the other. Sometimes, situational factors tip the scales. For example, your character might reach safety before being caught, she might know the territory better or find a shortcut, or she might even lose a pursuer.

A basic pursuit is an extended action. Both players roll over the course of several turns to see who reaches a target total of successes first. That person either gets away or catches up. The pursued receives a number of free extra successes based on her distance from the pursuer when the action begins. On foot, your character receives one free success for every two yards head start she has on her pursuer. In a vehicle, she receives one free success for every 10 yards head start. When the pursuit involves a mortal and a supernatural creature, the Storyteller should remember that mortals tire whereas supernatural creatures do not tire as quickly, if at all.

As you accumulate successes, your fleeing character outdistances her pursuer and increases her chances of losing him. Your opponent may have to make a Perception roll if your character extends her lead far enough to lose her pursuer. This Perception roll is modified based on the pursuit rolls you've made: Add one to Perception difficulty for each success you have gathered beyond your opponent's pursuit total. If your opponent fails this roll, he loses your character in a crowd, on a side street or in a maze of hallways and doors. On a Perception botch, the pursuer has no chance of finding your character again. If, on the other hand, you botch any of your rolls your character may end up in a dead end or may trip and fall. Caught!

• **Shadowing [Dexterity + Stealth/ Drive]:** When your character follows, stakes out or otherwise seeks to keep tabs on someone without being detected, she shadows that person. Shadowing suspicious people or monstrosities is a hunter staple; mortals have to know their prey before striking.

Many factors play into how this system is handled. The Storyteller can call it a resisted action (see Resisted Actions, p. 172) and ask you to roll versus a difficulty number based on the target's Perception + Alertness (to avoid being seen) or on his Dexterity + Stealth or Drive (if the target is actively evasive). You roll with those same Traits. You and your opponent compare successes to determine the outcome. A tie means the stalker remains undetected.

The Storyteller may also call shadowing both a resisted and an extended action (see Extended Actions, p. 172). Or, to make the roll fast and easy, you could both roll the appropriate dice pool versus a difficulty of 6 (modified based on the environment). In this last case, your opponent must get at least one more success to spot your character. Shadowers who have trained together can combine their separate rolls into one success total through teamwork.

Hunters who make an effort to recognize monsters for what they are through second sight (see Conviction, p. 132) may have an easier time of spotting their quarries. The image of a ghost hovering over a possession victim is hard to miss. Difficulties for shadowing are reduced by one or more (Storyteller's discretion) when second sight is used in a scene.

• **Sneaking [Dexterity + Stealth]:** The hunter who survives knows when to fight and when to simply hide. When your character sneaks, attempts to pass unseen or hides, roll Dexterity + Stealth as a resisted action against Perception + Alertness rolls from anyone in the area who has a chance of detecting him. The difficulty on all rolls is usually 6, though certain situational elements may modify it in favor of either the sneak or anyone who might notice him. Unstable footing, unsecured gear or lack of cover can all modify Stealth difficulty, just as high-tech security devices or superior vantage points can add dice to the Perception + Alertness rolls of potential spotters. If your sneaking character fails, he isn't necessarily discovered, but he may make a noise that causes guards to become more alert for the next roll. On a botch, your sneaking character runs right into the people he is trying to avoid.

• **Swimming [Stamina + Athletics]:** Your character must have at least one dot in Athletics to know how to swim. Otherwise, she never learned. Short swims require no roll. Long-duration or long-distance swims may. Your Storyteller may approach a long swim as an extended action with a difficulty based on your character's attempted speed, the weather conditions and the body of water itself. You may have to roll several times to achieve enough successes to meet the target. If you fail a roll, your character may falter, lose some of her total successes or have to make extra rolls.

Perhaps the current is stronger than she assumed. Your character runs into serious trouble on a botch: a cramp, a shark or even a boatload of enemies attempting to shoot her in mid-stroke.

• **Throwing [Dexterity + Athletics]:** When your character throws something (be it a knife, an ax, a grenade, a crystal ashtray or a frying pan), distance and accuracy determine whether it hits the target. Your character can throw anything that weighs three pounds or less up to a distance of (Strength x 5) yards. Each additional two pounds decreases the total possible distance by five yards. If your character can pick up an object, but its potential throwing distance drops to zero or below, the best she can do is hurl it to one side, approximately one yard. Obviously, if your character can't lift an object, she can't throw it (see Lifting/ Breaking, p. 183).

The Storyteller may reduce throwing distances if the object is particularly awkward, or increase them if it is aerodynamic. To throw an object, roll Dexterity + Athletics versus difficulty 6 (if target is closer than half the maximum range) or difficulty 7 (if the target is located between half and maximum range). The Storyteller may adjust the difficulty based on wind conditions, obstacles or whether the target moves or is stationary. On a botch, your character may hit an innocent bystander, release too late and hit herself, or simply succeed in putting her weapon in the hands of her enemy.

Mental Feats

The following systems cover tasks involving the three Mental Attributes (Perception, Intelligence and Wits). Occasionally, dice rolls related to the Attributes also involve Willpower. Difficulties may vary based on situational factors.

• **Hacking [Intelligence/ Wits + Computer]:** Computers may hold a wealth of information that can help hunters stalk and destroy their prey. In order for your character to hack into a computer, roll Intelligence or Wits (depending on the urgency of the job) + Computer versus a variable difficulty based on the complexity and security of the target system. Standard computer systems call for a difficulty of 6, whereas it could go as high as 10 for military or megacorporation mainframes. The number of successes you achieve is the number of dice (up to your normal dice pool) that you can roll thereafter to interact with the computer.

If someone or the system itself actively attempts to block your hack, a resisted action is rolled. The contender who gets the most successes wins. On a botch, your character may be traced and may face repercussions.

• **Investigation [Perception + Investigation]:** Investigating a crime scene, rifling through an office for clues, or performing an autopsy all fall under the general system Investigation. The Storyteller may call for an extended action when only one clue exists to be found. When more than one clue or varying degrees of information await the investigator, a simple action may be appropriate. In the latter case, the number of successes rolled determines how much is found. One success reveals small details, whereas multiple successes provide major clues or even allow your character to make deductions based on physical evidence. Teamwork certainly helps in investigations. On a botch, your character overlooks clues, interprets them erroneously or destroys them accidentally.

• **Repair [Dexterity/ Perception + Crafts/ Technology]:** Depending on your character's specialty, the Crafts and Technology Skills cover repairs as well as creations, everything from pottery to VCRs. Before your character can repair something, she may need to determine what's wrong with it. Obviously, a cracked vase is cracked, but it's much more difficult to see the reason a car won't start. Use a standard Research roll (see below) to analyze the problem. Once your character knows what's wrong, the Storyteller sets the difficulty of the repair. This rating depends on the severity of the problem, the complexity of the broken item, the availability of tools and replacement parts, and whether adverse conditions exist. Darkness could seriously hinder repair. An exceptional research roll may reduce the difficulty, if appropriate.

As a general rule, changing a tire has a difficulty of 4, whereas rebuilding a car's engine may have a difficulty of 9. The amount of time it takes to repair something also varies, and your Storyteller may treat the repair as an extended action. On a botch, your character may injure herself, irrevocably damage the object she's trying to repair or waste a good deal of her time.

• **Research [Intelligence + Occult/ Research/ Science]:** Your character may do research through computer databases, at the library, by studying a particular object or by talking to people. This effort may take time and a good deal of energy, though you typically make only one roll. The Storyteller determines how long research takes. The number of successes on the roll determines how much information your character manages to dig up. One success means she finds basic information, whereas multiple successes provide more details. The Storyteller may vary the difficulty based on the obscurity of the information sought. If you botch a research attempt, your character may discover nothing at all, or worse, find completely misleading information.

• **Tracking [Perception + Survival]:** Tracking is different from shadowing in that your character attempts to pick up the trail of someone or something, following physical evidence such as footprints, broken twigs, blood trails or tire marks. Tracking may be treated as an extended action with the possibility that the tracker could lose the trail at some point. The action might also be treated as a single roll with the number of successes determining the amount of information the tracker garners. In the latter case, multiple successes earn your character an understanding of the target's speed, estimated weight, shoe size, type of tire or even whether the target is alone.

The quarry may attempt to cover her trail with a Wits + Survival roll. Each success on this roll adds one to the difficulty of tracking her. Other factors may also affect tracking difficulty, such as weather, ground conditions or available light. If you botch, your character not only loses the trail but destroys it as well, removing any chance that anyone else could spot the signs.

Remember that the trails of some beasts are easier to follow than others. A shambling, mindless corpse doesn't take pains to gather rotted skin, lost digits or congealed blood. A wolf, however, could disguise its path very well, through a delicate touch or false scents, in urban or wilderness settings. The Storyteller should modify tracking difficulties based on the type of prey stalked.

Social Feats

This section covers tasks involving the three Social Attributes (Charisma, Manipulation and Appearance). Many social situations progress best through roleplaying, so you're encouraged to avoid rolling dice in social situations. Act them out instead.

• **Carousing [Charisma + Empathy]:** It pays to be the life of the party at times. Your character may want everyone to like her, and, whether she reciprocates or not, it may be beneficial to have the barflies on her side in a moment of truth. Some of the most poignant information can come from the mouths of drinking buddies and loose-lipped friends. The ability to carouse and show others a good time comes in handy. If your character wishes to win someone over by carousing, roll Charisma + Empathy, difficulty 6. The Storyteller may modify this difficulty if your character faces a particularly surly crowd or resistant individual. The target's Nature (Bon Vivant or Curmudgeon, for example) may also affect the difficulty number. On a botched roll, your character says or does the completely wrong thing and manages to piss off everyone.

• **Credibility [Manipulation/ Perception + Subterfuge]:** The Subterfuge Talent covers both attempts to deceive and to see through a deception. When your character perpetrates a scam, roll Manipulation + Subterfuge, whether he tries to impersonate someone trustworthy, use forged documents or propagate a lie. If your character attempts to detect a scam, roll Perception + Subterfuge. Both parties roll versus

a difficulty of 7 and, as with any resisted roll, the one who achieves more successes prevails. On a tie, the lie remains undetected. Particularly expert documents or other props may increase the difficulty for a character to perceive a scam, although teamwork increases the chance that someone sees through it.

The Storyteller may call for hacking or intrusion rolls during the preparation of the scam, depending on how it's set up. If you botch, the plan falls to pieces and, chances are, your scheming character is found out.

• **Fast-Talk [Manipulation + Subterfuge]:** When in the hot seat, baffle 'em with bullshit. Perhaps the other person believes your character's lies, is distracted from melee by your character's banter, or grows irritated and lets your character go. This scenario should be roleplayed as well as rolled. Use Manipulation + Subterfuge in a resisted action. Your opponent's dice pool equals his Intelligence + Subterfuge. Both roll versus a difficulty of 6. Whoever achieves more successes wins. Your fast-talking character gets nowhere on a tie, although his opponent pauses to listen. On a botch, the fast-talker goes too far and makes his situation more dire.

• **Interrogation [Manipulation + Empathy/ Intimidation]:** Asking questions is easy. Asking poignant questions with the right amount and type of coercion takes skill. When your character interrogates someone gently (Manipulation + Empathy), he asks strategic questions that lead the target to trust him and reveal information without realizing she's doing it. This system requires a resisted action. Roll Manipulation + Empathy, whereas the target gets a dice pool equal to his Willpower, both versus a difficulty of 6. The one with more successes prevails. The Storyteller may also request multiple rolls throughout the course of an interrogation or may simply have opponents roll once at the beginning or at the end of it all.

Not all interrogation is gentle and manipulative. Sometimes, interrogators use violent and direct methods to force information from their subjects. This approach involves a resisted roll as well. Whether he uses torture of the body or the mind, the interrogator rolls Manipulation + Intimidation, and the subject rolls a dice pool equal to her Stamina +3 or Willpower (whichever is higher). Difficulty is 6 for both. Torture may also be treated as a combination of resisted and extended actions. In-game time between rolls may vary, depending on the nature of the interrogation. The Storyteller determines how much time passes.

The victim suffers one health level, bashing or lethal, for every roll his player makes during serious physical torture (whether the interrogator is successful in gaining information or not), or loses one Willpower per roll of mental torture. Combining mental and physical torture has devastating effects on a victim. A botched roll can destroy her mind, cripple her for life or even kill her.

For every success, an interrogator (whether gentle or violent) gains above his subject's success total, he drags out additional information. If the interrogator's extra successes exceed the victim's permanent Willpower at any point, the subject folds completely and divulges everything she knows. Your Storyteller determines the relevancy and extent of information gleaned through interrogation, as a victim often gives a skewed account based on her own perceptions and on what she thinks her interrogator wants to hear.

If two or more interrogators combine efforts, they add their successes. This rule applies even if they are playing "good cop/ bad cop," with one player rolling based on Empathy and the other on Intimidation.

Hunters who torture supernatural subjects must remember that their victims are not necessarily human or even alive. Conventional forms of harm may not faze the creatures, whereas seemingly innocuous treatment could terrify them. Research or Occult may be required to learn about a monstrosity's weaknesses — or it may not have any at all.

• **Intimidation [Strength/ Manipulation + Intimidation]:** Intimidation has a passive and active side. Passive intimidation is used when your character's presence alone causes people to give him a wide berth, stay out of his way, avoid talking to him or provide whatever he requests. The higher your character's Intimidation Trait, the more people try to avoid annoying him. No roll is required.

Your character can also use Intimidation to actively coerce someone into doing something or *not* doing something. This effort can be a glare, a snarled threat or a gesture, but the threat is evident. In this case roll Manipulation + Intimidation as in a resisted action. Your opponent rolls her Willpower rating. Both roll against difficulty 6. The target player must achieve more successes than you do or she bends to your will. If you botch, your character only embarrasses himself or seems full of hot air. No one is impressed.

A character could forego threats and physically manhandle the target to intimidate her. Roll for a physical attack according to the combat rules, then roll for Intimidation.

Although a hunter may be impressive or frightening as people go, night-creatures probably aren't impressed by his presence alone — unless they know who and what the human really is. The hunter must establish a reputation. If he hasn't done so by word of mouth, he probably needs to establish one right away by defaulting straight to physical intimidation.

• **Oration [Charisma + Leadership]:** Many situations call for a character to make a speech, from convincing the police to investigate a corporate leader to convincing the public that a politician does not have its best interests at heart. Whatever the reason for your character's speech, roll Charisma + Leadership, usually versus a difficulty of 6. The Storyteller may increase or decrease the difficulty based on how receptive the audience is to the ideas expressed. If you

fail your roll, the crowd rejects the character's ideas. If you botch, your character may damage her reputation severely or the crowd may even decide to swarm her.

In the event that your character has time to prepare a speech in advance, the Storyteller may roll the character's Intelligence + Expression (difficulty 7) on your behalf. Success on this roll reduces the difficulty of the upcoming Charisma + Leadership roll by one. Failure changes nothing; a botch indicates the material is inappropriate or offensive to the listeners.

• **Performance [Charisma + Performance]:** Although hunters live bizarre, tragic, perhaps even secret lives, they had normal lives before their spirits were touched. They may even try to maintain some semblance of past passions, may use stage skills to hide their *other* lives or may try to bait monsters who appreciate the arts. When a character performs live before an audience, roll Charisma + Performance (difficulty 7). As with oration, the audience's mood can increase or decrease this difficulty, as can the show's complexity. One success indicates an enjoyable if uninspired effort, while additional successes make the performance a truly memorable event for even the surliest crowd. On a botch, your character forgets lines, hits the wrong chord or otherwise flubs.

Combat Systems

Into every life, a little rain must fall. Hunters are caught in a downpour. Like it or not, the scales have been torn from their eyes. The violent world they already know and struggle to survive in is now revealed to crawl with abominations, unspeakable horrors that stalk the unwary and ignorant. These monstrosities have such a stranglehold over humanity and even reality itself that efforts to expose the world for what it really is are ultimately futile. Therefore, hunters must take up the burden of their knowledge and do something about it.

As one of the imbued, you are a living weapon. You draw the line, not only in the sand, but in the trash-strewn streets and in the claustrophobic wilds — and then *you* cross it. In the name of *anything* sacred, enough is enough!

Combat is an inherent part of **Hunter: The Reckoning.** Eventually, after your character stalks a target, learns its secrets and its patterns, she must come face to face with evil incarnate. When that happens, there's no room for second-guessing, reason or even hope. If she intends to survive, she must bring all her arms to bear on the obscenities that prowl the night. If she doesn't, she'll die. Hell, your character might die either way. But at least she'll have made a stand to protect the world she once thought she knew and now can only long for.

Combat doesn't have to — nor should it — rule your game. There are many methods of warring against demons. Some have bank accounts or credit histories that can be erased. Others rely on minions who are far easier to take out than their masters. Some need shelter that can be denied. These guerrilla tactics are often necessary to wear down a foe before a direct confrontation (and they can mean the difference between imminent death and a fighting chance). However, combat ultimately plays an undeniable role in your stories. The following section details a combat system true to the dynamics, limitations and brutality of real battle, while still leaving enough room for high drama and creativity.

Feel free to ignore or change any of these systems, especially ones that create conflict among players or that interrupt the game's progress. The Storyteller can maintain a realism in combat through event description, without resorting to tedious rolls for every little move. Use the automatic-success rule (p. 170) where appropriate, and always strive for an outcome that's best for your story.

Remember that hunters are human, despite the powers bestowed or inflicted upon them. When a character might die, the dice keep things fair and prevent accusations of favoritism or bulldozing. Though no one wants her character to die, the dice ensure that events transpire without hard feelings.

Describing the Scene

Part of your Storyteller's job is making sure players have an accurate mental picture of the environment and events surrounding your character. She describes the setting, weather, time of day, lighting and the actions of any Storyteller characters involved in the scene. This responsibility is crucial in combat situations, where you need to know the dangers your character perceives and the options from which she may choose.

During combat, the Storyteller describes the changing environment after each turn. Once all players have acted, the Storyteller explains what each character sees and feels. They may all have access to the same information, or each may have his own perspective on transpiring events. These descriptions should be as detailed and creative as possible. This is the Storyteller's chance to show off his narrative talents and turn a series of dice rolls into a dramatic, amusing and entertaining story for the benefit of all.

Types of Combat

Two basic types of combat occur. Both utilize the same fundamental system, with minor differences.

• **Close Combat:** Up close and personal, this includes unarmed combat (Dexterity + Brawl) and Melee (Dexterity + Melee). Unarmed combat includes something as raucous as a barroom fight or as organized as a boxing match. Opposing characters use their bodies to fight and must be within reach

of each other (one yard). During Melee, opponents use hand-held weapons, which may include knives, broken bottles, tire irons, swords or hastily snatched chairs. Maximum fighting distance ranges from one to two yards.

• **Ranged Combat:** This type of armed combat involves projectile weapons (Dexterity + Firearms) such as guns, crossbows, spear guns, or thrown objects (Dexterity + Athletics). Range varies based on the weapon, though the target must be in sight.

Combat Turns

Combat scenes can sometimes be extremely confusing because so much goes on at one time. Keeping all the actions and repercussions straight is challenging. Combat almost always progresses through a series of three-second turns. The system for handling combat turns is further divided into three stages: initiative, attack and resolution. This division helps the Storyteller track characters' actions and their results.

Stage One: Initiative

Who gets to go first? You don't have to resort to going clockwise around the table, unless it works for you. We suggest the following, instead. At the beginning of each turn, all players roll one die and add the result to their initiative ratings [Dexterity + Wits]. Your Storyteller rolls for any characters she controls in the scene. The player with the highest result acts first, followed by the others in descending order of result. If two characters tie, the one with the higher initiative rating goes first. If both have the same initiative rating, they act simultaneously. Your character's wound penalties (p. 140) subtract directly from his initiative rating.

Next, all players announce their characters' intended actions. Declare these proposed actions in reverse order of initiative so that faster characters have a chance to decide their actions based on what they hear; a fast character has the opportunity to react to a slower character's actions. During this phase, players announce any multiple actions, activation of edges, teamwork, use of Willpower or Conviction points, or even a delay of action to see what other events unfold. The Storyteller may ask for clarification of your character's action to paint a complete picture.

Three possible exceptions may change the initiative order. If you choose to delay your character's action, you may act at any point *after* your designated place in the initiative queue. Called *yielding*, this option allows your character to pause and wait, allowing others to act first. You can even interrupt another, slower character's action. If two players both yield and finally decide to act at the same time, the one with the higher original initiative placement goes first.

Defensive actions may also interrupt the normal stream of initiative (see Aborting Actions and Defensive Maneuvers, p. 191). You can have your character defend herself at any time as long as you have an action left and either make a successful Willpower roll or spend a Willpower point. A defensive action takes place at the same time in the turn as the attack against which your character defends. You trade your normal action for the chance to protect against the attack. Your character may defend herself only (block, dodge, parry), though the Storyteller may decide that your character's defensive action does damage to the attacker.

Finally, all multiple actions occur after everyone else has gone, no matter where your character falls in the initiative queue. If both you and another player take multiple actions, you go in order of your initiative ratings. However, multiple defensive actions — those taken to defend against multiple attacks — occur at the time that the attacks take place.

Stage Two: Attack

Initiative establishes order and players announce their characters' intentions prior to the attack stage. The attack stage determines the outcome. Players roll for success one at a time, in order. The Storyteller guides you through this process, decides difficulties and which Attribute/ Ability combinations apply, and approves the use of Willpower or Conviction. If your character doesn't have an appropriate Ability, she can still attempt the attack, but the dice pool is drawn from the Attribute only.

Most combat falls under one of two categories: close or ranged. For close combat, roll either Dexterity + Brawl (unarmed) or Dexterity + Melee (armed). In the case of ranged combat, roll either Dexterity + Firearms (guns) or Dexterity + Athletics (thrown weapons). Any weapon used may modify your dice pool or difficulty, depending on its special or inhibiting aspects such as a targeting scope, antiquity or rate of fire.

Most attacks call for a default difficulty of 6. Situational modifiers (weather, lighting, range or cramped quarters) may adjust this number. If you fail the roll, your character misses and does no damage. If you botch, your character not only misses, but misery strikes. Perhaps the weapon jams or explodes, the blade breaks, your character punches a brick wall instead of her opponent, or she hits an ally or innocent onlooker.

Stage Three: Resolution

Once you determine that the attack hits, calculate the damage your character inflicts on his opponent. The type and amount of damage done depends on the method of attack. All attacks have specific damage ratings that indicate the number of dice (the damage dice pool) you roll to determine how much pain and injury your character causes.

The weapon used influences your damage dice pool, as do other situational factors. Any additional successes (i.e., all beyond the first one) gained on an attack roll, add an additional die to the damage dice pool. Your character not only hits his opponent, but he lands the blow with greater accuracy or power. If it's *your* character who's wounded, you may attempt to soak damage, rolling to determine whether her natural constitution offsets any harm. The rest of this chapter offers more detailed information on determining damage.

After you determine the damage your character inflicts upon her target, the Storyteller portrays that damage in descriptive terms, narrating the outcome of the attack. Rather than simply say, "Okay, the guy loses four health levels," the Storyteller makes events interesting. He might announce, "You plunge your knife into his rubbery flesh and pull upward, wrenching until the blade hits bone. The bastard screams in agony, but there's no blood. You watch as his chest collapses and begins to decay at an accelerated rate." By being evocative, your Storyteller creates atmosphere, entertaining you and lending a sense of narrative continuity to what would otherwise be a series of dice rolls.

Combat Summary Chart

Stage One: Initiative

- Everyone rolls initiative. Declare actions in descending numerical order, including multiple actions, activation of hunter powers or Willpower use. The character with the highest initiative attempts her action first. You may yield your turn until later in the initiative queue. With a successful Willpower roll or the expenditure of a Willpower point, your character can defend against an attack in exchange for her normal action. This defensive action takes place at the same time as the attack, no matter when your established initiative falls.

Stage Two: Attack

- Unarmed close combat, roll Dexterity + Brawl.
- Armed close combat, roll Dexterity + Melee.
- Ranged combat (guns), roll Dexterity + Firearms.
- Ranged combat (thrown weapons), roll Dexterity + Athletics.

Stage Three: Resolution

- You determine the damage inflicted by attacks, based on weapon type or maneuver, adding any extra dice gained from successes on the attack roll to the damage dice pool.
- Targets may attempt to soak damage, if possible.
- The Storyteller describes the attack and wounding in narrative terms.

Damage Types

Different types of attacks have different damage ratings that indicate the number of dice you roll to determine how much pain and suffering your character inflicts. Called the damage dice pool, it takes many factors into consideration, including the attacker's Strength or the nature of any weapon used.

Damage rolls are made against a base difficulty of 6. Each success inflicts one health level of damage to the victim. The victim may attempt to resist this damage by making a soak roll (see Soak, below). Based on the nature of the attack, two different types of damage may result:

- **Bashing:** Your character punches, hits with a blunt instrument or otherwise pummels her victim. This type of damage probably doesn't kill the target instantly, though repeated damage could certainly do so. Use your character's Stamina rating to resist bashing effects. Bashing damage heals fairly quickly (see Bashing Damage, p. 200 for more detail).
- **Lethal:** Gunshots, blades and even crushing damage may prove instantly fatal to your character. You may not use Stamina to resist lethal effects, and lethal injuries take quite a while to heal by normal means.

Your damage dice pool, whether bashing or lethal, must always have at least one die, no matter the modifiers. Even the weakest attack has a chance of inflicting a minor amount of damage. Furthermore, you cannot botch a damage roll. If you botch on a damage roll, it simply indicates that your character gives her victim a weak slap that does no real harm. Specifics of applying damage effects appear on p. 199.

Soak

Your character's natural resilience aids her in resisting damage under certain circumstances; she can "soak" damage. Your soak dice pool equals your character's Stamina rating. She can resist only bashing damage, unless she has special protection such as armor. Many supernatural creatures may soak lethal damage, but normal humans don't have that kind of fortitude.

During the resolution stage of combat, you may roll your soak dice pool to resist damage that your character incurs from attacks. As a reflexive action, this does not cost an action; it occurs automatically. *Soak rolls use a difficulty number of 6 unless modified by your Storyteller.* Each success you roll removes one from the total damage inflicted. As with damage rolls, you cannot botch a soak roll, only fail.

Example: Fowler eats a mouthful of zombie fist. His attacker scores two successes on the damage roll. Fowler has 4 Stamina; he's pretty tough as mere mortals go. Fowler's player rolls Stamina versus a difficulty of 6 and earns two successes, which cancel out both the levels of damage inflicted by the rotting cadaver. The Storyteller describes how Fowler reels back, nauseated by the decaying hand coming anywhere near his face. On his turn, Butch splatters the zombie's nose all over its dead face.

Optional Rule: Soaking Lethal Damage

Normal humans — including hunters — in the World of Darkness cannot normally soak lethal damage. However, if you want your game to have a bold, heroic flavor, you can let hunter characters soak bashing *and* lethal damage. The mechanics are the same for both: Roll Stamina, difficulty 6, to reduce damage successes achieved against your character. Perhaps that knife stabs your character in the arm instead of the chest, or those claws inflict a flesh wound instead of a disemboweling. The Storyteller decides if lethal damage can be soaked, depending on the theme and style of his chronicle.

Armor

A very important tool for hunters, armor comes in many shapes and forms. From a bullet-proof vest to a trash-can lid stuffed inside a jacket, armor increases your soak dice pool. Add armor's rating to your character's Stamina score when determining the number of dice in your pool. Armor can help protect against both bashing *and* lethal damage. Appropriate types of armor are required to resist lethal damage. Against lethal attacks, your soak dice pool consists of armor rating alone, not your character's combined Stamina and armor.

Attackers may make targeting rolls to hit unprotected portions of a defender and thus ignore armor. The Storyteller assigns the attack's difficulty modifier — typically +1 or +2.

No armor is indestructible. If the damage rolled in a single attack equals or exceeds double the armor's rating, the equipment is destroyed.

Armor may hinder mobility, too. It subtracts a number of dice from dice pools related to bodily coordination and agility (most Dexterity-based dice pools). Dice pool penalties are provided on the Armor Chart (p. 198). Hunters must weigh mobility versus protection when they stalk the unknown. Is it better to take most damage and walk away, but be a lumbering target? Or is it better to hunt unencumbered, to attack freely, but to risk life and limb at all times?

Armor types, their ratings and other specifics are on p. 198.

Combat Maneuvers

The following systems are options that characters may use during combat. If you visualize your character's moves — rather than just roll dice for a generic "attack" — the story becomes more interesting and the drama more intense. Most of these maneuvers take one action to accomplish.

General Maneuvers

• **Aborting Actions:** At any time during a turn, you can abandon your stated action to block, dodge or parry an incoming attack. You must either make a successful Willpower roll (a reflexive action) using Willpower rating as a dice pool, difficulty 6; or you can spend a Willpower point to be allowed to defend automatically. If your Willpower roll

fails, your character may not defend and must follow through with her originally declared action on your initiative.

You enact your defense at the moment the attack occurs, even if the attack occurs before your place in initiative comes around. If your character has already acted this turn, she may not defend against the attack. (See Defensive Maneuvers, below, for descriptions of blocking, dodging and parrying.)

• **Ambush:** To have your character sneak up on or secretly lie in wait for her quarry and get a surprise attack, roll Dexterity + Stealth with a resisted roll against the target's Perception + Alertness. If you score more successes than the victim, your character may stage one free attack against him, and you add any extra successes beyond the first in the ambush roll to your attack dice pool. On a tie, your character still attacks first, but the target may defend with a block, dodge or parry. If the target gets more successes, he sees your character coming and both parties roll initiative normally. Targets already involved in combat cannot be ambushed.

• **Blind Fighting/ Fire:** Situational factors — pitch darkness, blindness or physical damage — inhibit vision during combat. Attacking while blinded incurs a +2 difficulty to the roll, and ranged attacks cannot be made accurately at all. Certain hunter edges may offset some of these challenges.

• **Flank and Rear Attacks:** If your character attacks from the side or flank of his target, add a single attack die to your dice pool. If your character attacks from the rear, add two extra attack dice to your pool.

• **Movement:** A character can move half her running distance (see Movement, p. 181) and still take an action in a turn. She may follow that movement with an action, as well. Your character moves half the distance she could normally cover, then acts. Though this is not considered a multiple action, the Storyteller may impose a penalty to the difficulty number or to your dice pool for the action. On the other hand, if your character moves *while* attempting a second action, such as crossing a room while trying to reload her gun, each yard moved penalizes the other action's dice pool by one.

• **Targeting:** If you want your character to attempt a called shot or to aim for a specific location on the target, the difficulty of the attack roll increases. However, your character can bypass armor or cover, or can inflict extra damage by calling a shot. A successful targeted shot, punch or stab can have dramatic results beyond simply inflicting damage: the destruction of an object, blinding of an enemy or disarming of an opponent.

If your character uses a blunt object that would normally cause bashing damage, but she targets the victim's head specifically, the resulting damage may be considered lethal at the Storyteller's discretion. Refer to the following chart when determining difficulty and damage modifiers for aimed attacks.

Target Size	Difficulty	Damage
Medium (leg, arm, briefcase)	+1	No modifier
Small (hand, head, weapon)	+2	+1
Precise (eye, heart, padlock)	+3	+2

Defensive Maneuvers

When under attack, your character may defend rather than follow through on her intended action. So long as your character has not yet acted in this turn, he may attempt to dodge, parry or block an incoming attack. To attempt a defensive maneuver, you must either make a successful Willpower roll versus a difficulty of 6 or spend a Willpower point (see Aborting Actions, above). If your Willpower roll fails, your character may not defend and must follow through with her originally declared action on your initiative.

Your character can defend against almost any type of attack by using a dodge, block or parry maneuver. Not all of these options work in all situations, though. Dodging may prove impossible in a confined area. Your character doesn't know to block or parry if surprised. The Storyteller decides whether your character may realistically attempt a defensive action or not.

All defensive maneuvers use the same basic system. Each is treated as a resisted action; your defense roll is compared to the opponent's attack roll. If the attacker rolls equal or fewer successes, he misses. If the attacker rolls more successes than the defender, he subtracts the defender's successes from his own. Any leftovers are added to his damage dice. In this way, even though the defender does not prevent the attack, he reduces the amount of damage he takes from the hit.

• **Block [Dexterity + Brawl]:** Your character uses her own body to deflect a hand-to-hand bashing attack. Lethal attacks cannot normally be blocked unless the defender wears armor. Your character cannot block ranged attacks.

• **Dodge [Dexterity + Dodge]:** Your character bobs, weaves, ducks or dives to avoid an attack. It's assumed that she has the room to maneuver. If not, the Storyteller may disallow a dodge. In melee or brawl combat, the successful defender ducks out of the way of the attack. During a ranged attack, such as in a firefight, the successful defender moves at least one yard and ends up behind cover or prone on the ground. (For advice on what might happen next, see Cover, p. 196.)

• **Parry [Dexterity + Melee]:** Your character uses a melee weapon to deflect either an unarmed or armed close-combat attack. When your character parries with a weapon that can cause lethal damage, the attacker may actually be injured. If you roll more successes on the resisted action, add the weapon's base damage to the number of extra successes you earn on the defense roll. This total forms your damage

dice pool, which you roll to determine how much injury the defender inflicts on the attacker.

Defense Complications

Although characters' actions in a turn follow a particular order based on initiative rolls, it's important to remember that all the combat in one turn occurs over a period of only three seconds. This makes events nearly simultaneous. As a result, your character may defend against attacks that occur later in the initiative queue if you announce that she intends to use a multiple action to either take both a nondefensive action and a defensive one, or to just defend for the entire turn. This differs from what would happen if you wanted to abort your regularly scheduled action to have your character defend against an earlier attack. In the case of aborting, you give up your regular action and cannot defend against subsequent attacks.

If you do a multiple action involving both nondefensive and defensive actions, your character attacks when your place in the initiative queue comes up, and then also defends against any attacks thrown at her by characters that follow her in the queue. All of your character's attacks take place on your initiative, but she can continue to defend other incoming attacks until the end of the turn. The multiple-action system applies, though, and each subsequent defensive action becomes more difficult (see Multiple Actions, p. 171).

Example: Pauline wants Kara to perform a multiple action. Kara attempts to pick up a book lying on a table, thrust a knife into the corpse rushing at her, and defend against one other subsequent attack that turn. Pauline makes grabbing the book the priority and rolls Dexterity (3) + Athletics (3), for a total of six dice. She reduces her pool to three because Kara attempts to perform three actions this turn. Pauline makes the attack's Dexterity (3) + Melee (4) roll with a dice pool reduced by four because this is the second of Kara's multiple actions. These two actions occur during Kara's regular action phase because neither is defensive in nature.

The next person in the initiative queue then acts; the Storyteller's character takes a swipe at Kara. Kara now gets to defend. However, Pauline is still bound by the multiple-action modifiers. She begins with a dice pool of Dexterity (3) + Dodge (4), but reduces it by five, because this is the third of Kara's actions this turn, leaving her with only two dice to roll in Kara's defense.

Note that naming *multiple opponents* to defend against complicates matters further and adds to defense rolls' difficulty numbers (see Multiple Opponents, p. 194).

Rather than attack *and* defend in the same turn, your character can choose to do nothing but defend against attacks. As with the system above, this differs from aborting your turn to defend against an attack that occurs prior to your regularly scheduled action. Instead, you defend against only those attacks that occur simultaneously with or following you in the initiative queue. Your character may not defend against attacks that happen prior to her regular action. If your character does nothing but defend in this manner, do not use the multiple-action system. Rather, you have a full dice pool for the first defensive action and lose one die from it for each subsequent defensive action made in the same turn. When you run out of dice, your character may no longer defend against attacks. It's tough to avoid several incoming attacks.

Example: Pauline wants Kara to spend her entire turn dodging (Dexterity + Dodge). Kara may not defend against any attacks that occur prior to her action. Pauline must wait and begins Kara's defense only when Pauline's name comes up in the initiative queue. The first attack comes from the next person in line and Kara defends against it with her complete pool of seven dice. For the second attack, she reduces her pool by one, down to six. For the third, she removes another die bringing her total down to five. Several characters later, on the fourth attack, she resists with a dice pool of four. She rolls three dice against the fifth attack, two against the sixth and one against the seventh. On the eighth attack she has no dice left, so she can no longer defend.

Maneuver Characteristics

You usually roll combat maneuvers against a difficulty of 6. Certain special combat effects and situational factors may modify your attack roll, difficulty number or damage dice pool. The following categories explain maneuver characteristics in this chapter's rules.

- **Traits:** The recommended Attribute + Ability Traits used for the maneuver. If your character doesn't have the appropriate Ability, default to the Attribute alone.
- **Accuracy:** Some maneuvers add dice to attack rolls. A "+3" adds three dice to the attacker's dice pool for that attack.
- **Difficulty:** Some maneuvers impose modifiers, positive or negative, to an attack's difficulty. Base difficulty is 6; any modifiers listed add to or subtract from it. A "+2" indicates that the attack's difficulty — initially 6 — increases to 8.
- **Damage:** This category is the damage dice pool.

Close Combat Maneuvers

This is simply a list of the common maneuvers used in close combat. Your character can create his own; the Storyteller determines the appropriate Traits, difficulty, accuracy and damage involved. All brawling combat inflicts bashing damage unless stated otherwise. Weapon type determines the damage inflicted in melee (see the Melee Weapons Chart, p. 198). Damage inflicted using a weapon is typically considered lethal, though blunt objects such as clubs or bats deliver bashing damage.

The Storyteller may modify the difficulties and damages of the maneuvers described in this section, depending on the combat style your character uses. Always remember

that what works best for drama and the story takes precedent over rules.

• **Bite:** It's surprising how much damage a person can do simply by biting. Of course, a great deal depends on where and whom the hunter bites, but he can cause damage with clamped teeth nonetheless. The Storyteller may require that your character grab her victim successfully before a bite can be attempted. Your character may target a specific body part such as the nose, an ear or finger. Difficulty of the roll increases by +1 or +2, depending on the situation. Biting may be considered bashing or lethal damage based on the location and nature of the bite.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength

• **Clinch:** Your character grapples her target. She applies a clinch with a successful attack roll. Roll Strength damage in the first turn. In subsequent turns, your character and his opponent act in order of placement in the initiative queue. The attacker can attempt to inflict damage automatically by squeezing (Strength); no further attack roll is required. The victim can try to escape the clinch with his action. Neither may perform any other type of action until the victim breaks free or is released. Make resisted Strength + Brawl rolls for the victim to escape a clinch. If the escaping character gets more successes, he breaks free. Otherwise the two continue to grapple.

Traits: Strength + Brawl **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength

• **Disarm:** A character can knock a weapon out of an opponent's hand by making an attack roll at +1 difficulty (usually for a total of 7). If successful, roll damage dice. If damage successes exceed your opponent's Strength score, your character knocks the weapon free. Your opponent takes no damage; the attack focuses on the weapon rather than the wielder. If you botch, your character may drop her own weapon or get in the way of a blow instead.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl/ Melee **Difficulty:** +1
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Special

• **Hold:** This maneuver resembles a clinch, but without intent to do damage. Your character immobilizes but does not injure the target. If your roll succeeds, your character manages to hold her target until the target's next action. Both players roll resisted Strength + Brawl at that time. If your opponent gets more successes, he is free. If he does not, the victim remains immobilized until his next action — at which point he may try again.

Traits: Strength + Brawl **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** None

• **Kick:** A simple knock to the shins imposes a +1 modifier to difficulty and inflicts the attacker's Strength +1 in damage. The Storyteller may increase these numbers if your character attempts a spinning martial-arts kick to the head or something equally complex.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** +1
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength +1

• **Multiple Opponents:** When fighting multiple opponents, your character suffers attack *and* defense difficulties of +1, cumulative for each opponent after the first, to a maximum of +4.

• **Scratch:** Women have used their nails against aggressors for centuries. It works for men as well in some cases. If your character targets a specific body part such as eyes, scratching may have secondary effects. The Storyteller may increase the difficulty of the attack by +1 or +2 for called shots. Scratching is considered bashing damage for healing purposes.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength

• **Strike:** Your character simply punches. The base attack is a simple action and inflicts your character's Strength in damage. The Storyteller may wish to increase the difficulty and/ or damage dice if the attack is more complex or targeted at a specific location.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength

• **Sweep:** Your character attempts to knock her opponent off his feet with a sweep of the leg or use of a weapon such as a staff or chain. If your roll proves successful, your character's opponent takes Strength damage and must roll Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 8) to avoid a knockdown (see Maneuver Complications, p. 196).

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl/ Melee **Difficulty:** +1
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength; knockdown

• **Tackle:** Your character rushes her opponent in an attempt to tackle him to the ground. Your attack roll suffers a +1 difficulty modifier. If successful, Strength +1 damage is inflicted. However, *both* combatants must roll Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 7) or suffer a knockdown (see Maneuver Complications, p. 196). Even if your character's target succeeds at his Athletics roll, he is still unbalanced and suffers a +1 difficulty to his actions in the next turn.

Traits: Strength + Brawl **Difficulty:** +1
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength +1

• **Weapon Length:** When an opponent wields a sword, staff or other long melee weapon, your character finds it difficult to get within range to punch, kick or stab. The difficulty of your attack roll increases by +1 as the opponent fends off your character.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** +1
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Per weapon type

• **Weapon Strike:** Your character uses a weapon to slash, thrust or jab in melee. See the Melee Weapons Chart, p. 198, for particulars.

Traits: Dexterity + Melee **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Per weapon type

Ranged Combat Maneuvers

A number of strategies affect ranged-combat maneuvers. Many physical conflicts involve ranged weapons, and the following systems offer ways to deal with them. Feel free to create your own maneuvers. The Ranged Weapons Chart, p. 198, provides more specific information.

- **Aiming:** For each turn that your character aims at her target, add one die to your attack pool. The maximum number of dice that can be gained this way equals your character's Perception, and your character must have at least one dot in Firearms to perform this maneuver. If the weapon has a scope, add two more dice if your character aims. Your character must focus on aiming during this time and can perform no other actions. Taking an action before shooting, even to defend, cancels the benefits of time spent aiming. Furthermore, your character cannot aim at a target moving faster than a walk.
- **Automatic Fire:** A weapon unloads its entire ammunition clip in one attack against a single target. You make one roll, adding 10 dice to the weapon's accuracy. However, difficulty increases by +2 due to recoil. Extra successes beyond the first add to your damage dice pool, which is still treated as equivalent to that of one bullet. When using automatic fire, your character may not target a particular part of the body or object, and she may attempt the maneuver only if her weapon's clip is at least half-full when she fires.

Example: Victor unloads a full AK-47 clip at the raging, hairy demon bearing down on him. Victor's player, Jim, rolls Dexterity (4) + Firearms (3) + 10 (for the maneuver) for a total of 17 dice in his pool. The Storyteller sets the difficulty at 8 (6 for short range +2 for recoil). Jim gets six successes and the creature doesn't dodge. Jim now rolls 12 dice for damage — 7 (the base damage for an assault rifle) + 5 (for the extra successes). The clip is completely empty and Victor must reload — assuming the creature lets him keep his hands.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms **Difficulty:** +2
Accuracy: +10 **Damage:** Special

• **Cover:** Your character may duck behind a wall, lie flat on the ground or use another character as a shield. All these maneuvers constitute cover. It makes your character more difficult to hit, but it may also make it awkward for your character to attempt other actions. The difficulty to hit a character behind cover increases according to the chart, below.

By the same token, the difficulty to fire back from the safety of cover increases; your character must pop up, fire, then duck down again. If your character fires back from shelter, the difficulty modifier to your roll is one less than the modifier listed on the chart below. Thus, if the difficulty listed below is +1, you suffer no increase to your difficulty for firing back.

If both combatants take cover, difficulty modifiers are cumulative. If your character hides behind a car and her target hits the dirt — prone — your attack difficulty is modified by +2 (+1 for firing at a prone target, and +1 for firing from behind a car). Your opponent's difficulty is also modified by +2 (+2 for firing at a target behind a car, though he takes no modifier for firing from a prone position).

Cover Type	Difficulty Increase
Light (lying prone, behind streetlight)	+1
Good (behind car)	+2
Superior (around a corner)	+3

• **Multiple Shots:** Your character can take more than one shot in a turn; it's a multiple action. The first shot's dice pool is reduced by the total number of shots fired, and each subsequent one is reduced by an additional die, cumulatively. The weapon's rate of fire limits how many shots your character can get off in a turn.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Special **Damage:** Weapon type

• **Range:** The Ranged Weapons Chart, p. 198, lists each weapon's short range. All attacks at short range call for a difficulty of 6. A weapon's maximum range is double its short range. Attacks from a range greater than short, but less than maximum, have a difficulty of 8. A target within two meters of the attacker is at point-blank range. Roll point-blank shots versus a difficulty of 4.

• **Reloading:** Your character must spend one full turn to reload her gun. She may reload while doing something else as a part of a multiple action at the Storyteller's discretion.

• **Strafing:** Firing a full-automatic weapon across an area rather than at a specific target adds 10 dice to a standard attack roll, and empties the clip. This maneuver, called strafing, covers a maximum of three yards.

Make one attack roll and, if successful, divide your successes evenly among all targets in the designated area. The successes assigned to a particular target are added to your damage dice pool for that specific target, as well. If there is only one target within range or area of effect, only half the successes affect him. If you roll fewer successes than there are targets, you or the Storyteller assign one per target until all have been allocated. (Your Storyteller may prefer to allocate successes randomly; other targets remain unaffected). Dodge rolls versus strafing are at +1 difficulty.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms **Difficulty:** +2
Accuracy: +10 **Damage:** Special

• **Three-Round Burst:** Your character fires three shots from the weapon's clip at a single target, and you gain two additional dice on your attack roll. Only certain weapons have the capacity to fire this way; see the Ranged Weapons Chart. Recoil adds +1 to the difficulty of your attack roll. As with automatic fire, your damage dice pool is formed as if only one bullet had been fired from the weapon.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms **Difficulty:** +1
Accuracy: +2 **Damage:** Weapon type

• **Two Weapons:** Your character gains a distinct advantage by firing two weapons at once, although this maneuver has its share of complications. Considered a multiple action, the maneuver imposes the standard reduced dice pools for total shots fired. Recoil modifiers apply as well. Additionally, your attack rolls suffer +1 difficulty for her off hand, unless she's ambidextrous. Your character may fire a number of shots equal to the weapons' rates of fire.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms **Difficulty:** +1/off-hand
Accuracy: Special **Damage:** Weapon type

Maneuver Complications

Combat can be complicated by numerous events, several of which are listed below. Your Storyteller should feel free to come up with others as a situation warrants.

• **Blinded:** If your character acts against a blind opponent, you gain two extra dice on any attack rolls. On the other hand, blind characters receive a +2 modifier to the difficulty of all actions.

• **Dazed:** If, on any single attack, your damage successes exceed the target's Stamina (for humans) or Stamina +2 (for supernatural beings), the victim is dazed. Only successes left over after the defender's soak attempt apply and are compared to the defender's Stamina. A dazed victim loses his action, whether this turn or the next; he can neither act nor defend during that time. The character may still trigger reflexives, though.

• **Immobilization:** When your character attacks an immobilized victim who can still struggle (held by someone, for example), add two dice to your attack roll. All attacks hit automatically if the victim is completely immobilized (tied up or somehow paralyzed).

• **Knockdown:** Your character falls or is forced off his feet. Make a Dexterity + Athletics roll to determine whether he can stand immediately. However, his initiative is reduced by two in the next turn. If the roll fails, your character's next action can be to rise. In case of a botch, your character falls hard or at an odd angle and suffers one bashing health level of damage automatically.

Your character may use certain maneuvers such as sweep or tackle to knock down an opponent. Other particularly powerful attacks — a solid punch or hit with a bashing weapon — may also knock a target flat. Your Storyteller decides if a knockdown occurs in these instances. They happen only when cinematic or appropriate to the story.

• **Stake Through Heart:** Hunters can rarely identify the creatures they confront, let alone know their weaknesses. And yet, there are the classic Hollywood solutions to monsters: fire, garlic, religious symbols — and a stake through the heart. Whether the last actually works or has any bearing on the heart at all is unknown without extensive research or occult knowledge. After all, wouldn't a stake through the heart kill just about anything? Hunters have to learn whether the legend is true the hard way, and they might not survive to teach the lesson.

To stake an opponent, an attacker must target the heart (difficulty 9). The Storyteller decides whether any special effects result, if any.

Ability: Dexterity + Melee **Difficulty:** +3
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength +1

Close Combat Maneuvers Table

Maneuver	Traits	Accuracy	Difficulty	Damage
Bite	Dex + Brawl	Normal	Normal	Str
Block	Dex + Brawl	Special	Normal	(R)
Clinch	Str + Brawl	Normal	Normal	Str (C)
Disarm	Dex + Brawl/ Melee	Normal	+1	Special
Dodge	Dex + Dodge	Special	Normal	(R)
Hold	Str + Brawl	Normal	Normal	(C)
Kick	Dex + Brawl	Normal	+1	Str +1
Parry	Dex + Melee	Special	Normal	(R)
Scratch	Dex + Brawl	Normal	Normal	Str
Strike	Dex + Brawl	Normal	Normal	Str
Sweep	Dex + Brawl/ Melee	Normal	+1	Str (K)
Tackle	Str + Brawl	Normal	+1	Str +1 (K)
Weapon Strike	Dex + Melee	Normal	Normal	Weapon

(C): The maneuver carries over into successive turns.
(K): The maneuver causes a knockdown.
(R): The maneuver reduces an opponent's attack successes.

Ranged Combat Maneuvers Table

Maneuver	Traits	Accuracy	Difficulty	Damage
Automatic Fire	Dex + Firearms	+10	+2	Weapon
Multiple Shots	Dex + Firearms	Special	Normal	Weapon
Strafing	Dex + Firearms	+10	+2	Weapon
3-Round Burst	Dex + Firearms	+2	+1	Weapon
Two Weapons	Dex + Firearms	Special	+1/off-hand	Weapon

Melee Weapons Chart

Weapon	Damage	Conceal
Sap+	Str +1	P
Club+	Str +2	T
Knife	Str +1	J
Sword	Str +2	T
Small Ax	Str +2	T
Large Ax	Str +3	N
Stake*	Str +1	T

Weapon: Your character may use many other items as weapons (meat cleaver, pencil, razor, chair). Apply the listing above that approximates the weapon used.

Concealment: P = Can be carried in pocket; J = Can be hidden in jacket; T = Can be hidden in trench coat; N = Cannot be concealed at all.

\+ Blunt objects inflict bashing damage unless targeted at the head (see Targeting, p. 192). If so, they may inflict lethal damage.

* The attacker must target the heart (difficulty 9).

Armor Chart

Class	Armor Rating	Penalty
Class One (reinforced clothing)	1	0
Class Two (armor T-shirt)	2	1
Class Three (Kevlar vest)	3	1
Class Four (flak jacket)	4	2
Class Five (full riot gear)	5	3

Ranged Weapons Chart

Type *Example*	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal
Revolver, Lt. *SW M640 (.38 Special)*	4	12	3	6	P
Revolver, Hvy. *Colt Anaconda (.44 Magnum)*	6	35	2	6	J
Pistol, Lt. *Glock 17 (9mm)*	4	20	4	17+1	P
Pistol, Hvy. *Sig P220 (.45 ACP)*	5	30	3	7+1	J
Rifle *Remington M-700 (30.06)*	8	200	1	5+1	N
SMG, Small* *Ingram Mac-10 (9mm)*	4	25	3	30+1	J
SMG, Large* *HK MP-5 (9mm)*	4	50	3	30+1	T
Assault Rifle* *Steyr-Aug (5.56mm)*	7	150	3	42+1	N
Shotgun *Ithaca M-37 (12-Gauge)*	8	20	1	5+1	T
Shotgun, Semi-auto *Fiachi-Law 12 (12-Gauge)*	8	20	3	8+1	T
Crossbow**	5	20	1	1	T

Damage: Indicates the damage dice pool. Firearms deliver lethal damage against mortals. The type of damage may vary against supernatural enemies (see Chapter 9).

Range: This number represents the practical shot range in yards (difficulty 6). Your character may fire at twice this distance, but attacks are considered long range (difficulty 8).

Rate: The maximum number of bullets or three-round bursts a gun can fire in a single turn. This rate does not apply to full-auto or strafing attacks.

Clip: The number of shells a gun can hold — the +1 indicates a bullet can be held in the chamber, ready to fire.

Concealment: P = Can be carried in pocket; J = Can be hidden in jacket; T = Can be hidden in trench coat; N = Cannot be concealed at all.

*Indicates the weapon is capable of three-round bursts, full-auto and strafing.

**Crossbows require five turns to reload. A character may use a crossbow to attempt to stake a creature with a targeted shot

Health

As a hunter, your character puts his life in jeopardy the moment he decides to do something about the horrors that stalk the world. They've been in power for who knows how long — decades, centuries, millennia? They have abilities beyond his worst nightmare. Meanwhile, your character is human and has only just woken up to the truth. How can he expect to stand for long against impossibly powerful, bizarre, ageless creatures? Most hunters can't. They're beaten, maimed, broken and left for dead — and those are the lucky ones. Getting hurt — perhaps badly — is a forgone conclusion. But when those creatures are still out there, committing obscenities and playing with the lives of the unwitting, what's one more person's pain and suffering? You may have no choice but to fight on, regardless of the cost.

Your character's Health Trait represents how healthy or wounded he is. When your character suffers damage, every success removes one level of Health from him. As your character becomes progressively more injured, his wounds affect his ability to perform actions (modifiers are applied to the dice pools of certain tasks). If he's hurt badly enough, he may become incapacitated, need hospitalization or even die. And if he lives, months may pass before he heals fully. The following section explains Health in detail.

Health Chart

Health Level	Dice Pool Penalty	Movement Penalty
Bruised		Slightly contused; your character suffers no movement or dice-pool penalties.
Hurt	-1	Superficially hurt; your character suffers no movement penalties.
Injured	-1	Hurt; your character's movement is impaired slightly (halve maximum running speed).
Wounded	-2	Significantly hurt; your character may not run, though he may still walk or jog.
Mauled	-2	Badly hurt; your character may hobble no more than three yards per turn.
Crippled	-5	Extremely hurt; your character may crawl no more than one yard per turn.
Incapacitated		Direly hurt; possibly unconscious; your character may do nothing, take no actions and, if unconscious, only certain reflexives such as soak may be attempted.
Dead		What more is there to say? What will your next character be like?

The Health Chart

Track your character's current physical condition on the Health chart located on your character sheet. This chart indicates the penalties imposed to your dice pools for each level of injury your character sustains. As he suffers more injuries, his health declines, his actions become more difficult and he may eventually fall unconscious or die.

Every character has seven health levels ranging from Bruised to Incapacitated. If he has no injuries at all — no Health levels checked off on the sheet — your character is in perfect health. If he falls below Incapacitated, he's dead. Whenever your character's attacker scores a success on a damage roll, mark off one health level on your character's Health chart. Multiple successes deliver multiple levels of damage. For example, if your character's attacker achieves one success on a damage roll (after your soak roll) and your character is currently in perfect health, that damage success reduces him to Bruised. You mark off the first box on your character sheet (Bruised).

The number to the left of the lowest box marked indicates your current dice penalty. The more damage your character takes, the more difficult it becomes for him to act at full capacity. Subtract the dice penalty listed beside your character's current health level from your dice pool for every action your character performs (including initiative rolls, but excluding reflexives such as soak rolls) until the wound heals. These penalties also affect movement, impairing it based on the level of injury.

Incapacitated

When your character's Health drops to Incapacitated, your character may or may not be conscious, at the Storyteller's discretion. He may request that you make a Stamina roll to determine whether your character remains awake. If unconscious, she may not perform any reflexives related to her Conviction or Willpower, though she may still attempt to soak any further damage. If your character manages to remain conscious, she may continue to perform all reflexives, though she has fallen and can't get up — at least not until some of her wounds have healed. She may also speak , but even that may prove difficult. The Storyteller may request a Willpower roll or expenditure for your conscious character to say anything at all.

Applying Damage

Your character can sustain two different types of damage: bashing and lethal. Bashing damage includes any wounds inflicted by blunt instruments, punches, kicks or other similar trauma. Lethal damage comes from knives, bullets or any type of attack that actually pierces or cuts flesh. All types of injuries are cumulative and the resulting total determines

your character's current health level. Specifics on each type of damage are provided below.

When marking your character's damage on his character sheet, record a "/" for bashing damage and an "X" for lethal damage. These marks go in the boxes beside the different health levels on the Health chart. Mark the top square first and work your way down, filling them in as your character becomes more wounded.

When your character acquires a mixture of lethal and bashing damage, mark the lethal damage at the top; it pushes any bashing damage down. For example, if you mark that your character has taken a level of bashing damage in the Bruised box, and she then takes a level of lethal damage, mark the Bruised box with an "X" for the lethal damage and move the bashing damage down by putting a "/" in the Hurt box. Any further bashing damage goes in the Injured box and beyond. Any further lethal damage pushes the entire thing down again until all the boxes are marked with either "/" or "X."

Once all the boxes are marked, any further damage, whether lethal or bashing, causes existing bashing damage to turn into lethal damage on a one-to-one basis. Once all the boxes are marked, it isn't necessary to continue pushing bashing damage downward. Any further lethal damage simply marks over existing bashing damage.

Example: Kara runs down a dead-end alley. Several walking dead surround her. One of them hits her with a lead pipe causing one level of bashing damage. Pauline marks that on Kara's character sheet by putting a "/" in the box next to Bruised. Kara manages to fight the first monster to the ground, but is in deep trouble. Another corpse comes up behind her and rakes her back with its jagged nails, doing two levels of lethal damage. Pauline marks this damage with an "X" in the boxes next to Bruised and Hurt, then moves the original bashing damage down by marking a "/" in the box next to Injured. Kara, slashed and bleeding, draws her gun and shoots. The zombies back off... a little.

Health	
Bruised	
Hurt	-1
Injured	-1
Wounded	-2
Mauled	-2
Crippled	-5
Incapacitated	

Bashing Damage

Any kind of damage that does not pierce the body, but that batters against it, is considered bashing damage. This includes most damage from hand-to-hand combat, punches,

kicks, beatings with a blunt instrument and even falling or being thrown into a brick wall. Certain targeted bashing attacks may cause lethal damage, at the Storyteller's discretion (see Targeting, p. 192). Use a "/" when marking bashing damage on your character sheet.

Once your character falls to Incapacitated, mark any further bashing damage over your existing bashing levels (using "Xs" this time). Skip any boxes already marked with lethal damage and move down to the first that is bashing only. Each level that goes from "/" to "X" due to ongoing bashing trauma is now considered lethal. Once your character goes one level below Incapacitated with lethal damage ("X"), she dies. Your character may therefore die from prolonged bashing attacks, but not nearly as quickly as from lethal damage alone (see Healing Bashing Damage, below).

If bashing damage injures your character to the level of Incapacitated, she may neither act nor move as dictated by the Incapacitated rules, above.

Example: Kara races out the mouth of the alley, desperate to escape her attackers. Staggering into the street, she is hit by a passing car and thrown into a brick wall. She suffers three levels of bashing damage. Pauline marks these on her character sheet as slashes next to Wounded, Mauled and Crippled. The new wounds add to the ones Kara has already sustained.

Though seriously injured, Kara stumbles toward a restaurant where she believes the creatures won't follow. One of the monsters catches up with her just inside the doorway and slams her to the floor. This attack inflicts another two levels of bashing damage. Pauline marks one of them on Kara's Health chart as a "/" in the box next to Incapacitated. She then marks the other one as an "X" next to Injured. Because the chart is full, she must turn the uppermost bashing damage already marked into lethal damage. Any further bashing damage slowly turns those "/" marks into "X" marks. Kara is in dire straits. Incapacitated, she can't defend herself.

Lethal Damage

Attacks made with piercing or cutting weapons — such as knives, guns, crossbows or swords — deliver lethal damage. Fire and electricity also cause lethal damage. A human, mortal character — all hunters — may not usually soak lethal damage at all. Such damage is applied directly to your character's Health chart. Mark lethal damage on your character sheet with an "X." Once your character becomes Incapacitated lethally, meaning that you have marked an "X" in the box next to Incapacitated, any further damage, whether bashing or lethal, kills your character.

Lethal wounds require immediate medical attention to keep the victim from bleeding to death. If, while tallying your character's cumulative injuries, you mark an "X" next to Wounded or beyond, your character suffers one extra lethal level of damage automatically for each hour that passes thereafter without medical attention to stop the bleeding. One success on an Intelligence/ Wits + Medicine/ Survival roll by a rescuer allows the character administering first aid to stop the bleeding. Extra successes may even allow the rescuer to treat the character well enough to actually heal some of his injuries. So long as your character is not Incapacitated, he may attempt to stop his own bleeding (see Healing Lethal Damage, below).

If, through the course of your character's cumulative injuries, you mark an "X" next to Crippled or Incapacitated, your character *must* seek more complete medical care, or he does not recover at all. A rescuer may manage to stop the bleeding, but extra successes do nothing to heal any of your injured character's wounds. If your character has an "X" next to Incapacitated, he is comatose at worst and delirious at best, and could still die even if all attacks have stopped. Your Storyteller determines the nature of these injuries and may even roll for further injury if your character does not receive critical medical treatment within an appropriate amount of time.

Example: Kara lies on the restaurant floor, stunned, and begs for someone to help her. The place is deserted. Well, not quite. Her attackers have followed her and brought friends.

She already has three lethal wounds and is Incapacitated from her bashing wounds. The walking dead descend upon her again with teeth gnashing and claws rending. One of them bites flesh from her neck, delivering one level of lethal damage (as decreed by the Storyteller and given the nature of her attackers' jagged teeth and nails). Pauline marks the Wounded box with an "X." Because the chart is already full with bashing damage to the level of Incapacitated (as shown in the previous example, above), she doesn't need to push down the bashing damage.

Incapacitated, Kara still can't defend herself, so a creature with razor-sharp claws tears open her abdomen and deals one more level of lethal damage. Pauline marks the Mauled box with an "X."

The third monster bites a huge chunk from her arm to inflict yet another level of lethal damage. Pauline marks the Crippled box with an "X." Kara can do nothing but moan and twitch.

The leader of the unholy pack leans over Kara and leers down at her. He punches her solidly in the face, inflicting one level of bashing damage. Pauline marks through the bashing damage next to the Incapacitated box, making it lethal. She does so because Kara's chart is full and any further bashing damage marks over what bashing damage is already there. Now, all boxes on Kara's chart are filled with lethal damage. One more wound, whether lethal or bashing, will kill her. Fortunately, the cavalry arrives and shoots up the restaurant, killing everything in it — except Kara. Her friends pull her to safety and get her to a hospital right away.

Optional Rule: Large Fights

Your Storyteller may introduce nameless and faceless Storyteller characters to beef up a combat scene and make it more challenging. These people, called extras, may work for the chronicle's main antagonist or may simply be thugs whom the hunters encounter. The Storyteller uses extras as a plot device to provide information, give your characters a combat challenge or to deliver a message. Extras don't usually appear individually in more than one scene and interact very little with your characters on a personal basis.

To simplify large fights, the Storyteller may assign only four health levels to extras: Hurt -1, Mauled -2, Incapacitated and Dead. These levels make combat quick and enjoyable for players, and still offer an accurate representation of events.

Healing Times

This flesh is weak. People heal slowly, and hunters are reminded of their mortality the first time they venture out against the abominations of the world. Smart hunters never work alone and always have a variety of weapons to rely upon. The bottom line is that a dead hunter does no one any good, so most spend their time and energy avoiding the line of fire.

Healing takes time. Although certain hunter edges may decrease that time (see Chapter 5), an injury can remove your character from action for months. It pays to work with others and to have an ally with special healing powers or abilities. Healing may occur during downtime (see p. 167), but only if nothing else of importance occurs during that period.

The following sections explain how humans heal. Every level of damage (whether bashing or lethal) must be recovered individually. Thus, a character Incapacitated by bashing damage must spend a full 12 hours at that level before he can even hope to be only Crippled. Once he has healed from Incapacitated to Crippled, he must spend another six hours at Crippled before he heals to Mauled, and so on.

Healing Bashing Damage

Bashing damage involves injuries that do not pierce the body, but simply bruise it through a blunt attack such as brawling combat, use of a flat weapon or a fall. Bashing damage does not require medical attention. The wounds eventually heal on their own. However, serious injuries may have greater consequences. Your character's vision or hearing may suffer due to concussion; she may experience excruciating pain from internal bruising, or even lose muscle control in a limb. Appropriate medical attention, whether edge-related or mundane, can negate some of these effects.

Healing Times for Bashing Damage

Health Level	Recovery Time
Bruised to Wounded	One hour each
Mauled	Three hours
Crippled	Six hours
Incapacitated	12 hours

Healing Lethal Damage

Lethal wounds can kill a hunter quickly; being fed upon, disemboweled, shot, impaled or dismembered has disastrous implications. If the original wound doesn't kill the hunter, blood loss might. Further complications such as infection, nerve damage or broken bones can have long-term effects.

Any lethal damage past and including Wounded requires medical attention to prevent further damage. Your character must find a way to stop the bleeding immediately. She continues to suffer one lethal health level for every hour that passes without first aid to stop her bleeding. Your character may attempt to stop her own bleeding as long as she is not Incapacitated. A single success on an Intelligence/ Wits + Medicine/ Survival roll allows a character to either halt her own bleeding or someone else's.

If your character is injured up to and including Mauled with lethal damage, she may recover at home with rest and care — once the bleeding has been stopped. However, if Crippled or beyond with lethal damage, your character must receive more complete medical treatment at a hospital, doctor's office or other appropriately equipped facility. Otherwise, she continues to suffer one health level of lethal damage for every day that passes without treatment. Although no longer under attack, your character could still die from the complications of her wounds.

Thus, a hunter reduced to Crippled or Incapacitated loses blood *and* requires complete medical attention for his wounds. If neither is tended to, the character bleeds to death before his critical wounds overcome him.

Healing Times for Lethal Damage

Health Level	Recovery Time
Bruised	One day
Hurt	Three days
Injured	One week
Wounded	One month
Mauled	Two months
Crippled	Three months
Incapacitated	Five months

States of Being

The World of Darkness is a deadly place. It was before hunters were confronted with *the truth*. Now that they know monsters — raging beasts and lingering spirits — exist, the world poses a threat to body and *soul*. The following systems present a variety of ways in which characters can suffer harm, whether physical or mental.

Derangements

Derangements are behaviors that occur when the mind is forced to confront intolerable or conflicting feelings, such as overwhelming terror or profound guilt. When the mind is faced with impressions or emotions that it cannot reconcile, it attempts to ease the inner turmoil by stimulating behavior such as megalomania, schizophrenia or hysteria to provide an outlet for the tension and stress that the conflict generates.

The mental stress that hunters suffer, thanks to their very existence, makes them highly prone to derangements. Indeed, many imbued think themselves delusional the moment they first witness the supernatural, and they certainly question their own sanity when the world seems monstrous. The first days and weeks after being imbued prove the hardest, as hunters seek to come to grips with who they are. It's only when they discover others who see the same and can sympathize that some relief comes. But it's short-lived, for the existence of other hunters only proves that the world *is* monstrous.

Even if a hunter can reconcile the voices and signs he experiences, the creatures he perceives and the disturbing abilities he possesses, his faculties must still contend with the hunt. Witnessing the depredations of monsters is enough to drive the stoutest of the imbued mad. Grisly murders, terrifying magical displays and the (frequent) seeming futility of the war can drive hunters over the edge.

And if a hunter endures all this hardship with even a mote of sanity intact, all his resilience can ultimately seem for naught. The truly accomplished among hunters, those who achieve high Virtue scores, seem to spiral away from normal human thought processes. The hunt takes on new meaning and purpose for them — directions that other, less immersed hunters cannot fathom. Hunters who achieve this intensity manifest a variety of derangements, perhaps as what remains of their minds tries to cope with apparently otherworldly visions and concepts.

"Lesser" hunters speculate that the Heralds take direct control of such extremist imbued. Others claim these fanatics truly understand hunters' mission, and the knowledge drives them mad. It's no consolation for hunters who remain to realize that being lucky enough to survive the mission can ultimately cost one's humanity itself. Fortunately, such fringe elements seem just as uncomfortable around "stable" hunters. These people simply fade from hunter circles altogether, pursuing whatever bizarre agendas and objectives that they conjure. At least, that's what appears to have happened to the few extremists who made noisy exits from the hunter subculture.

Hunters gain derangements when their Virtue scores reach 7 and higher (see Virtues, p. 127). Others can gain derangements when subjected to intense terror, guilt or anxiety. Further examples of derangement-inducing events include killing a loved one in battle, being tortured or watching fellow hunters fall to the supernatural in particularly grotesque ways. Generally, any experience that causes intense and unpleasant emotion or that thoroughly violates your character's beliefs or ethics is severe enough to cause a derangement. The Storyteller decides whether your character suffers an ailment, and decides which he receives, choosing (or creating) one appropriate to your character's personality and the circumstances of the event that cause the disorder.

It must be noted that people who are "crazy" are neither funny nor arbitrary in their actions. Insanity is frightening to people who watch someone rage against unseen presences or hoard rotten meat to feed to monsters. Even something as harmless-sounding as talking to an invisible rabbit can be disturbing to observers. (Is it any wonder that normal people take all hunters for mad?)

The insane, however, respond to a pattern only they know, stimuli that they perceive in their own minds. To their skewed perceptions, what happens to them is perfectly normal — *to them*. Your character's derangement is there for a reason, whether she saw her own children devoured alive, or she begins to believe that humanity must be culled to diminish monsters' feeding stock. What stimuli does her insanity inflict upon her, and how does she react to what happens? Work with the Storyteller to create a pattern of provocations for your character's derangement, and then decide how she reacts to such provocation.

Derangements are a challenge to roleplay, but a little time and care can result in an experience that is dramatic for all involved.

Obsessive/Compulsive

The trauma, guilt or inner conflict that causes this derangement forces your character to focus nearly all of his attention and energy on a single repetitive behavior or action. Obsession relates to an individual's desire to control his environment — keeping clean, keeping an area quiet and peaceful, or keeping undesirable individuals from a place. A compulsion is an action or set of actions that an individual is driven to perform to soothe his anxieties: placing objects in an exact order, constantly checking to make sure a weapon is loaded, praying every few hours to give thanks for surviving that long.

If your character has an obsessive or compulsive derangement, determine a set of specific actions or behaviors, as described above. Your character follows them to the exclusion of all else, even if they interfere with the mission or endanger his life or others' lives. The effects of obsessive/compulsive behavior can be negated for the course of one scene by spending a temporary Willpower point. If a hunter is forcibly prevented from adhering to his derangement, he may lose control amongst enemies or allies and attack either (or both) indiscriminately.

Multiple Personalities

The trauma that spawns this derangement fractures your character's personality into one or more additional personas, allowing her to deny her trauma or any actions the trauma causes by placing the blame on "someone else." Each personality is created to respond to certain emotional stimuli — an abused person might develop a tough-as-nails survivor personality, create a "protector," or even become a murderer to deny the abuse she suffers. In most cases, none of these personalities is aware of the others, and they come and go through your character's mind in response to specific situations or conditions.

You and the Storyteller must agree on how many and what kind of personalities develop, and the situations that trigger their dominance. Each personality should be relevant to the trauma that causes it. Not only is each personality distinct, but in the case of hunters, different personalities might believe themselves to be normal humans, followers of other primary Virtues, the Messengers incarnate or perhaps even monsters.

Hunters with multiple personalities can manifest different Abilities or perhaps increased or diminished Conviction for each identity, but it is the Storyteller's responsibility to determine the specific details.

Schizophrenia

Conflicting, unresolveable sets of feelings and impulses can cause your character to develop schizophrenia, which manifests as a withdrawal from reality, violent changes in behavior and hallucinations. This derangement is the classic sort, causing victims to talk to walls, imagine themselves to be the King of Siam, or receive murderous instructions from their pets. Hunters who turn to conventional medicine for help are typically diagnosed as schizophrenic. Hunters themselves sometimes have difficulty recognizing the schizophrenic among their allies. After all, many hunters perceive themselves apart from mankind, they hear voices and they see walking evil.

Roleplaying this derangement requires careful thought, because you must determine a general set of behaviors relevant to the trauma that causes the condition (becoming a more dedicated hunter can count if doing so means denying previous or commonly accepted values). Hallucinations, bizarre behavior and disembodied voices stem from a terrible inner conflict that the individual cannot resolve. Establish a firm idea of what that conflict is and then rationalize what kind of behavior it causes.

Hunters with this derangement are unpredictable and dangerous — even more so than usual. In situations that trigger a hunter's inner conflict, a point of Conviction can be lost until the episode passes.

Paranoia

Your character believes that her misery and insecurity stem from external persecution and hostility. Paranoids obsess about their persecution complexes, often creating vast and intricate conspiracy theories to explain who torments them and why. Anyone or anything perceived to be "one of them" might be subjected to violence.

Committed hunters are often classified as paranoid, but they have good reason for being that way. Paranoia about monsters stalking your character does not classify as this derangement, unless your character takes every hunter's fear to a new level. Perhaps his obsession leads him to sacrifice everything he has and everyone he knows to fight his pursuers. Maybe any cost of human lives is worth the chance to strike at the enemy oppressing him.

A hunter who suffers from paranoia has difficulty with Social interaction; the difficulties of all such dice rolls increase by one. Your character is distrustful and wary of everyone, even hunters alongside whom he was imbued. The slightest hint of suspicious behavior is enough to provoke a Willpower roll to retain control, with the difficulty relative to the degree of the behavior. Examples of "them" beyond monsters are fellow hunters, the Messengers, or human authorities, whether corrupted or untouched by the supernatural.

Megalomania

Individuals with this derangement are obsessed with accumulating power and wealth, with salving their insecurities by becoming the most potent individuals in their environment. Your character is invariably arrogant and supremely sure of her abilities, convinced of her own inherent superiority. The means of achieving such status can take many forms, from devious conspiracies to outright brutality. Any individual of equal or higher status than your character is perceived to be "competition."

Hunters with this derangement struggle constantly to rise to the height of power and influence, by any means necessary, whether against monsters, fellow hunters or the defenseless. In a megalomaniac's view, there are only two classes of people: those who are weaker; and those who do not deserve the power they have, and so must be made weaker. This belief extends to everyone, including your character's immediate allies. This derangement lends an extra die to all of the victim's Willpower rolls, due to her towering sense of superiority.

Hysteria

A person in the grip of hysteria is unable to control her emotions, suffering severe mood swings and violent fits when subjected to stress or anxiety. For hunters, that can be all the time. Decide on a particular circumstance that triggers your character's episode: the presence of children, contact by the Heralds or perhaps open flame.

You must make a Willpower roll whenever your character is subjected to this brand of stress or pressure. The difficulty of the roll is usually 6, increasing to 8 if the stress is sudden or especially severe.

Manic-Depression

Manic-depressives suffer from severe mood swings, sometimes resulting from severe trauma or anxiety. Victims may be upbeat and confident one moment, then uncontrollably lethargic and pessimistic the next.

Hunters with this derangement are constantly on a hair trigger, never knowing when the next mood swing will strike. Whenever your character fails a task, the Storyteller has the option of making a secret Willpower roll (difficulty 8). If the roll fails, your character lapses into depression. Additionally, your hunter goes into depression whenever one of her rolls botches, or if her Willpower ever drops below two. The Storyteller should roll a die to determine how many scenes your character remains depressed, keeping the number a secret.

A hunter in a depressive state loses a point of Conviction (to a minimum of 1) for the duration of the mental episode. Upon emerging from the depressive state, the character is energetic, relentlessly upbeat and active (obsessively so) for a number of scenes proportional to the time spent in depression. When your character is in this manic state, the difficulty of all Willpower rolls is reduced by one.

Fugue

Victims suffering from fugue experience "blackouts" and loss of memory. When subjected to a particular variety of stress, your character begins a specific, rigid set of behaviors to remove the stressful symptoms. This syndrome differs from multiple personalities; an individual in the grip of a fugue has no separate personality, but is on a form of "autopilot" similar to sleepwalking. Decide on the kind of circumstance or exposure that triggers this state: the death of a defenseless human, confrontation with a specific sort of creature, confinement.

Make a Willpower roll when your character is subjected to the appropriate extreme stress or pressure (difficulty 8). If the roll fails, you must roleplay your

character's trancelike state; otherwise, control of your character passes to the Storyteller for a number of scenes equal to the roll of a die. During this period, the Storyteller may have the character act as she sees fit to remove the source of the stress. At the end of the fugue, your character "regains consciousness" with no memory of her actions.

Disease

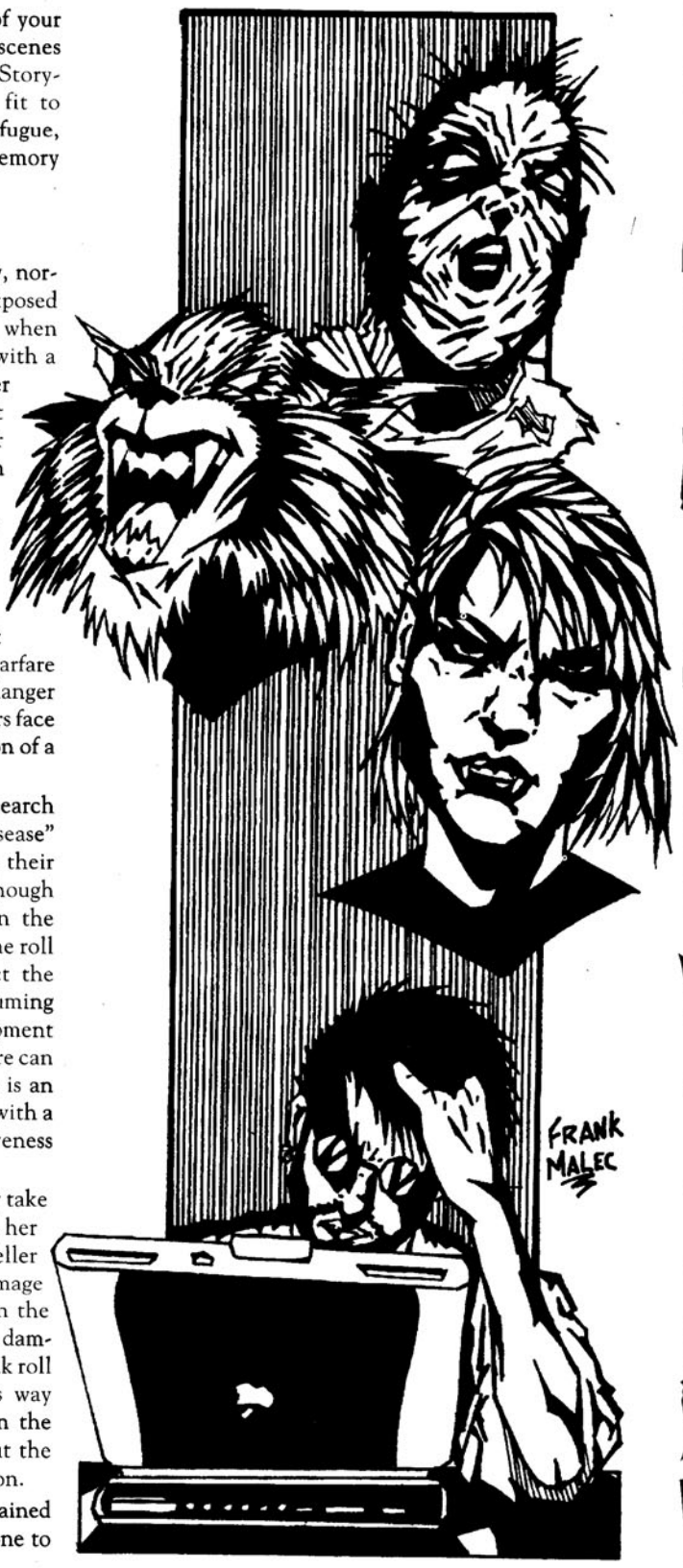
Diseases ravage the World of Darkness. Sadly, normal people are their primary victims. Hunters are exposed to disease constantly — an occupational hazard when blood, rotted flesh and ichor start to fly. Tangle with a bloodsucker carrying HIV and the mortal hunter risks infection. Tangle with a walking corpse that died of who-knows-what and the mortal hunter risks infection. Some night-creatures may even knowingly infect humans around them!

Other diseases — including ebola, cancer caused by exposure to radiation, or even a simple cold — can also affect hunters. The Storyteller can use the threat of infection as a plot device to increase tension and introduce socially relevant topics to a story. She could introduce biological warfare and serial killers using disease as a weapon to take danger to new heights. Moral issues could arise as characters face unwitting disease carriers, or deal with the infection of a friend, family member or fellow hunter.

Characters with appropriate training can research antidotes and cures for diseases. Perhaps the "disease" that drives people to drink blood or that keeps their bodies alive after natural death can be undone. Although finding a cure for HIV should not occur within the framework of your game, an Intelligence + Medicine roll (difficulty 7) can allow your character to detect the presence of HIV, hepatitis or other diseases, assuming your character has access to the appropriate equipment and a sample of the victim's blood. Developing a cure can take hours, days or years. Developing an antidote is an extended action (Intelligence/ Wits + Medicine), with a goal of 10 or more successes depending on the elusiveness of the ailment. The difficulty may vary as well.

If your character suffers from a disease, she may take damage over time based on her rate of degeneration, her Stamina and the nature of the disease. The Storyteller determines how often your character must face damage from the disease, and how many dice are rolled in the disease damage pool. Your character may resist that damage using a soak roll, though the difficulty of the soak roll may increase over time as the disease works its way through your character's body. Extra successes on the soak roll may buy your character time, or even put the disease into remission, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Talk on the net has it that those few hunters trained in recognizing and curing diseases are working on one to



fight bloodsuckers and other creatures. The ethics of introducing a disease to kill a parasite may be dubious at best. Would an infected human vessel be required to release the contagion? And who knows what effects the disease might have on people?

Drowning

Some of the creatures that hunters stalk don't seem to need air to survive. Hunters do. Your character can drown if submerged completely, held underwater or if a swimming roll botches and the Storyteller is cruel (see Swimming, p. 184). A hunter can hold her breath as indicated on the following chart:

Stamina	Holding Breath
1	30 seconds
2	One minute
3	Two minutes
4	Four minutes
5	Eight minutes

Willpower can also be spent to continue holding breath; each point grants another 30 seconds if Stamina is 3 or lower, or another full minute if Stamina is 4 or higher.

When your character can no longer hold his breath, he begins to drown or suffocate, as appropriate. A drowning hunter suffers one lethal health level each turn. This damage cannot be healed with hunter powers until the character is out of the hostile environment. When your character reaches Incapacitated, he dies in one minute per point of Stamina.

Electrocution

Electricity does nasty things to humans. Considered lethal damage, an electrical shock can kill a hunter. If your character comes in contact with a source of electricity without appropriate insulation, she takes damage. The Storyteller may ask you to roll Strength (difficulty 9) to determine whether your character can pull away from the current. Armor does not protect from electricity, though certain other precautions such as grounding might. Your Storyteller has final say on whether your character's rubber-soled boots help at all.

The following chart shows the amount of damage delivered based on the source of the electrical shock. Your character may suffer permanent damage if she falls to Incapacitated as a result of electrical shock. The results may be impairment (loss of Physical Attributes), permanent memory loss or brain damage (loss of Mental Attributes), or disfigurement (reduced Appearance). The Storyteller decides whether your character's injuries are this severe.

Health Levels/Turn	Electrical Source
One	Minor; wall socket
Two	Major; vehicle battery
Three	Severe; protective fence, junction box
Four	Fatal; main feed line, subway rail

Explosives

A hand grenade can go a long way toward slowing down that shambling hunk of rotting flesh. Then again, maybe not. Any number of explosive devices might come in handy, such as pipe bombs, plastique, dynamite or even fireworks. Some of these do little more than start fires, others have concussive and even shredding effects, and some may turn monsters into walking infernos. Characters may use explosives as weapons against their enemies, or they may use the devices to break down a door or open a safe.

The Storyteller must remember that these weapons aren't widely available, and many of them are strictly illegal. The Arsenal Background (p. 120) at sufficient level is required to have personal access to explosives. The Resources, Contacts, Allies or Streetwise Traits might also be combined to acquire these weapons. Of course, hunters can always steal what they need. What do some hunters care about the law when the police are ignorant of — or party to — the true evils of the world?

Your character may throw explosives, such as grenades or pipe bombs, or set them in a stationary location and wait for the target to pass, as in the case of timed or triggered bombs. If your character throws an explosive, roll Dexterity + Demolitions/ Athletics to determine whether she places it where she intends. If your character sets the bomb with a timer or trigger, roll Dexterity + Stealth to actually put it in place without being detected. Then roll Wits/ Intelligence + Demolitions to determine whether she configures and detonates the bomb correctly. A botch while using explosives may put a grenade at your character's feet or may detonate a bomb during setup.

A grenade or bomb has a damage pool as indicated on the Explosives Chart. That number is the damage inflicted at ground zero. Reduce damage by one die for each yard that a potential victim stands from the epicenter. Extra successes achieved in an explosives attack roll (whether thrown or set) *do not* increase the amount of damage done; ground zero is simply more deadly than are the fringes of the blast radius. Dodge rolls versus explosives are at +1 difficulty.

If an explosives attack roll misses, you probably want to determine where or when the explosion takes place and whom it does affect, if anyone. The intended target is assumed to be outside the blast radius. In the case of a thrown

explosive, randomly determine a direction from the target in which the blast occurs. In the case of a set explosive, determine how much time passes before the charge does explode, if at all. Watch out; your character or his allies could wind up the unwitting victims.

Most explosives inflict lethal damage unless stated otherwise. Armor may protect against impact, but not necessarily against burning.

The Explosives Chart details a few weapons. Many variables play into the effects of an explosive, so the chart offers only broad suggestions regarding these devices.

Explosives Chart

Type *Example*	Damage	Conceal
Incendiary* *Molotov Cocktail*	4	P
Concussion** *Concussion Grenade*	8	P
Shredding *Shrapnel Grenade*	10	P
Single Destructive *Stick of Dynamite*	15	P
High Explosive+ *Plastique*	20	Variable

*Incendiary devices ignite the target (see Fire, below). Damage delivered by the explosion is bashing, though damage caused by the fire is lethal.

**Concussion explosives deliver bashing damage and knock the target down (see Knockdown, p. 197).

+Timed or triggered bombs that hold a variable amount of dynamite, plastique or other explosive cause damage to surrounding structures and ignite flammable materials, which complicates damage. The figures listed are suggestions only.

Falling

Hunters who chase their prey up fire escapes or from roof top to roof top must be prepared for the consequences. Your character might walk away from a short fall or never walk again after a long one. The chart below lists the number of damage dice your Storyteller rolls. If your character falls 30 feet or less, damage can be diminished by grabbing outcroppings or tumbling upon impact. Make a Dexterity + Athletics roll against the difficulty listed on the chart. Each success on this roll reduces the damage dice pool of the fall by one. Any remaining damage successes are bashing; you can make a soak roll. If your character falls more than 30 feet, no amount of acrobatics helps, and damage is lethal; its effects cannot be soaked.

Certain armor types may help your character resist bashing or lethal damage, at the Storyteller's discretion. Modifiers may also apply based on where your character lands; concrete hurts a lot more than water, depending on the altitude of the fall. The numbers on the chart assume a hard surface awaits.

Falling Damage

Feet	Save Roll	Difficulty	Damage Dice
10	Dex + Athletics	7	2 (bashing)
20	Dex + Athletics	8	5 (bashing)
30	Dex + Athletics	9	10 (bashing)
40	None	—	10 (lethal)
50	None	—	10 (lethal)
60	None	—	10 (lethal)

Fire

The nature, extent and temperature of a fire all affect how destructive it is to your character's body. The greatest danger arises when his clothes ignite and he continues to take damage even after the initial flame attack. Stop, drop and roll! Your character takes damage automatically in every turn that he remains in contact with the fire, until he escapes or extinguishes the blaze. (No "attack" dice are rolled for fire; health levels are simply lost as if successes had been rolled.) Fire causes lethal damage; your character may not soak it.

Health Levels/Turn	Size of Fire
One	Clothing or hair on fire; body part exposed to torch or similar small fire
Two	Bonfire; half the body exposed to extensive flames
Three	Inferno; entire body engulfed in raging fire

Poisons and Drugs

A poisonous or intoxicating substance introduced into the body limits your character's ability to perform — at best. At worst, it kills him. It's impossible to discuss every poison or drug that your character might be exposed to, but the list below offers direction on how to handle various kinds.

Hunters are human and can easily become addicted to a drug or might even develop an immunity to a poison. The terrible burden of recognizing evil personified is enough to drive anyone to pleasure wherever they can find it, no matter how self-destructive. Some hunters convince themselves that they can do their job only when drunk or high. Others

are so disciplined, so focused that they believe repeated exposure to drugs and poisons — among other abuses — makes them stronger for the resultant resistance.

• **Alcohol:** You subtract one die from any Dexterity, Perception, Intelligence or Wits dice pool for every drink your character consumes within an hour. This effect fades at the rate of one die per hour until all the alcohol is purged from your character's system.

• **Marijuana:** You lose one die from any Dexterity, Perception, Intelligence or Wits dice pool for every hit your character takes from a joint or bong within an hour. This effect fades completely an hour after the last toke, unless your character continues to "medicate" himself.

• **Hallucinogens:** All dice pools lose one to three dice depending on the strength of the hallucinogen. Your character may experience confusing, frightening or enraging hallucinations, although he may manage to realize that they exist in his drugged mind only (Intelligence + Streetwise/ Empathy, difficulty of 6, with the one to three dice penalty in place). Depending upon the nature of your character's "trip," you may actually gain dice in a pool for a relevant Trait that's enhanced by the experience. The effects last for (8 minus Stamina) hours.

• **Cocaine/ crack/ speed:** Your character may experience a +1 increase in Strength or Stamina, though he also may become edgy and paranoid. The Storyteller bases the effects of the drug on the volume that your character takes, how pure it is and on your character's state of mind.

• **Heroin/ morphine/ barbiturates:** Pain subsides, but your character enters a dreamy state for (8 minus Stamina) hours. All dice pools are reduced by two dice during this time.

• **Salmonella (food poisoning):** Your character becomes nauseated within an hour of eating and suffers one health level of bashing damage. He loses one die from all Dexterity and Strength dice pools for (8 minus Stamina) hours.

• **Poison:** The nature and strength of the poison determines how much damage your character suffers. As a general rule, your character takes from one to three levels of bashing damage per scene or even turn (depending on the intensity of the poison). The effects last and damage continues to accrue until the poison wears off or an antidote is provided. Some poisons such as acids and chemicals may deliver lethal damage if they burn the mouth, esophagus or stomach.

Temperature Extremes

Extreme heat or cold has an adverse effect on your character. It may reduce his Dexterity, Strength or even affect his mental acuity by reducing Wits. Under the worst conditions, it deals damage. Frostbite, hypothermia or heat exhaustion have dire consequences. The Storyteller can represent extreme weather conditions through reduced dice pools, increased difficulties or even the accumulation of damage.

Example of Play

[Three players gather together on a Friday night to continue the story they began the week before. Their characters (Marilyn, Kara and Tony) have been investigating a series of disappearances. They follow clues that lead them to a carnival passing through the outskirts of their hometown. The characters agreed to stake out the carnival in the previous session. When they arrive, they split up to cover more ground, but plan to meet again near the Ferris wheel in an hour. The Storyteller talks out downtime events with each player and pauses to begin roleplaying when something interesting happens to one of the characters.]

Marilyn used to know how to enjoy herself. She used to enjoy listening to others' laughter. Now she just wishes they'd all shut the hell up. She can barely hear her own thoughts amid the cacophony of the carnival. The tinkling music from the carousel, the clamor of talking and cries of wonder, the children screeching, the screams from the rides and the calls of the barkers all encroach upon her attention. She needs to stay alert, but it's difficult in this grating din.

The aromas of sugar, hot dogs and animal dung linger in her nose to resuscitate childhood memories. A glimmer of that same old excitement tickles her spine, but then an eerie man passes through her peripheral vision, and the feeling dies as quickly as it came. She watches him walk by, holding her breath until it burns. He continues on without so much as a glance. He's just another of the ignorant masses. Marilyn breathes again.

Her boots sinking into the littered mud, Marilyn stakes out the crowd. She pays to see the snake-man; ultimately, another normal person, despite his impressive tongue. She pays to ride through the haunted house, and searches for anything that may hide its identity among the artificial horrors. Growing discouraged that she's wasting her time, Marilyn buys a weak lemonade and a greasy hot dog — the first "meal" she's had all day. Standing beside a faded candy-cane-colored tent, she lights a cigarette and discovers that trouble doesn't always have to be searched out.

"You're a pretty lady," a small voice says. It comes from the darkness between the tents.

Marilyn spots an angelic child, a little boy with a heart-shaped face. Feeling little enthusiasm, she eventually replies, "Yeah, thanks." She tries to force her facial muscles into a ghost of a smile and offers, "You lost?" Her cigarette flares of its own accord, the fire catching a seed. It draws Marilyn's eyes, but only for a moment. Nothing unusual here.

[The Storyteller makes a secret roll without telling anyone why. He wants to find out how alert Marilyn is to the boy, but he doesn't want to give anything away if the roll should fail or botch. He rolls Marilyn's Perception + Alertness versus a difficulty of 8. He puts six dice into his pool from her Perception (3) and Alertness (3) and rolls 2, 2, 5,

8, 8, 9 — three successes. The Storyteller describes how Marilyn gets a strange feeling from the child, a niggling fear.]

The little boy shakes his head. Flashing red and blue lights strung nearby cast soft hues onto the boy's white-blond curls. His cupid's-bow lips curve up with the kind of smile that snakes give as a salve to future wounds. Marilyn frowns. Not even she can explain why, but something strange and surreal in the child's large, blue eyes makes her spine tingle. She glances around for her companions, Kara and Tony, but they're nowhere in sight. She debates whether she's in danger, looks down at the kid again and feels her courage swell. He's just a little boy.

Marilyn manages to put a smile on her face and ask, "What's your name?"

"Satan."

Marilyn blinks. Her courage falters in her stomach, threatens to desert her. "Don't be silly," she growls to herself as much as to the boy.

The little boy shrugs carelessly, "Don't believe me. I don't give a damn."

[The Storyteller makes another secret Perception roll for Marilyn to determine whether she notices any other pertinent information about the child's demeanor. The Storyteller forms the dice pool from Marilyn's Perception + Alertness and sets a difficulty number of 8. He gathers a dice pool based on Perception (3) and Alertness (3), and rolls 2, 4, 4, 6, 7 and 9 — one success. This minimal success gives the character only the most obvious information about the child.]

Marilyn studies the boy curiously, guessing that he can't be any older than eight. His brown pants and green sweatshirt fit him well. They're clean. Mud clings to his white tennis shoes, but then her own boots are covered with the muck, too. The logo on his sweatshirt reads, "Jesus Loved Me, Once."

"I'd better go," Marilyn announces.

"No!" complains the boy. "You gotta come see my mama." He reaches for Marilyn's hand, his small fingers grasping. "You got to!"

[The Storyteller states the child's intention to take Marilyn by the hand and, rather than roll dice for it, Marilyn's player agrees to go along for now, roleplaying the moment for dramatic effect.]

With a shake of her head, Marilyn tries half-heartedly to pull her hand away, but the child refuses to release her, using both hands to tug her toward a tent.

"It'll only take a minute, I promise!" the boy whines. "My mama… she's very sick and I promised I'd bring help. Please! You gotta come see." Tears fill his eyes.

Marilyn's brow knits as she stares at the child suspiciously, resisting as she decides what to do. She scans the area, but her companions are still nowhere to be found. She knows *something's* not right. She knows she's not *supposed* to handle these things alone. But, if she refuses, they could lose the kid, or worse, the kid could grab someone less prepared to deal with the….

Marilyn shakes her head to escape the awful visions emerging in her mind. Unwilling to risk losing this potential lead, she goes with the boy. She can handle it. Right?

The boy sniffles, pulling Marilyn into the tent, into the darkness.

"It's okay," the boy encourages. "You'll understand in a minute." He smiles happily, his tears dried up. Pulling aside a flap, he precedes her inside, tugging her along.

Marilyn leans in across the threshold, refusing to enter any further.

[At this point, the Storyteller gives Kara and Tony's players a chance for their characters to see Marilyn disappear with the child. He allows Kara's player an automatic success, as she has seven dice in her Wits (4) and Alertness (3) pool (the difficulty he chose was only 6). Because he knows Kara will tell Tony, the Storyteller doesn't bother to make either player roll. Kara notices Marilyn going with the boy.

[Taking Kara and Tony's players aside, the Storyteller asks them what their characters do. They head toward the tent. He describes the distance to the tent and promises to let them know when their characters arrive.

[The Storyteller then asks Marilyn's player to make a roll using her Willpower score versus a difficulty of 6. The player gathers six dice and scores 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 8 — three successes. Marilyn has enough courage to face what she finds in the tent.]

An oppressive darkness looms inside the tent. As large as a two-car garage, it smells of kerosene, hay and dead skin. Marilyn blinks back the dots before her eyes as she tries to acclimate her vision. She feels the boy's hand slip from hers and has the sudden urge to run. Her rational mind fights back the panic, and she chastises herself for her cowardice.

"Mama?" The little boy's voice comes from somewhere in the darkness.

From the far side of the tent a new, feminine voice responds, "That you, my little angel?" Marilyn turns toward the voice. Its deep rasp lends credence to the boy's claim that his mother is ill.

"Yeah, mama. I brought a nice lady for you." The boy's tone sings with pride.

"Oh, you are my darling boy. Light the lamp, will you, so I can look at her?" A moment later, the boy lights a match that illuminates his face with a warm, orange glow. He lifts the globe to a kerosene lantern and touches the flame to the wick. The lamp flickers its glow in a wide circle, bringing most of the tent's secrets into view.

Marilyn's eyes narrow as she takes in her surroundings. A thick pole rises in the center, supporting the arcked roof. Brightly colored silk scarves decorate it, swaying slightly in an anonymous breeze. The impromptu

living room has couches and settees, piles of cushions and low coffee tables, all carefully arranged on the hay-covered earth. In the soft lighting, the furniture has an otherworldly feel: fringed upholstery and tasseled cushions of rich ruby, emerald, gold and sapphire. Marilyn has the sudden sensation that she has stepped back to a different time and place, where sheiks rule their subjects with murderous glee. For a moment, she almost believes that if she turns around and leaves she'll step into a desert of shifting sands.

A shadow ripples in the far corner where the light doesn't reach.

Swallowing, Marilyn asks tentatively, "Your son says you're ill?" She takes a step forward. A few feet inside won't be too dangerous. The exit is right at her back.

A deep chuckle rises, and the other woman announces huskily, "Is that what he said? Well, yes, I suppose that's one way of looking at it." The little boy's giggle must please his mother, because she laughs with him. "I try not to fret about it too much. There's not much I can do at this point. I'm lucky to be... alive."

Marilyn's hackles rise. She changes her mind about the whole situation. Taking a step back into the triangular doorway, she slips a hand into her pocket and offers, "I'd better be going, then. I'm... meeting someone."

"No you're not," the throaty voice purrs. "You came here alone and now you're afraid. Why are you afraid?"

"I'm not afraid."

"Yes you are. Don't try to lie to me. I can smell your fear." The sound of sniffing and a pleased sigh come from the obscured corner. "Don't worry. I won't eat you."

A shuffle of hay behind Marilyn alerts her to the presence of a third person. She turns to see a large man wearing denim overalls and a red-flannel shirt. His ragged hair fringes down from a bald spot, and his eyes have a limpid emptiness. He blocks the exit, towering over her.

"Daddy!" cries the little boy, pleased. The man gives no response, and Marilyn wonders if he's even aware of the boy.

"Oh, wonderful," hisses the mother happily, "we're all here."

The man smiles mindlessly at Marilyn. His bulky arms rise and spread, aimed at wrapping around her.

Marilyn thinks she cries, "No!"

[Marilyn's player must make a resisted roll versus the Storyteller to determine whether Marilyn can dodge the lunge. The Storyteller rolls Dexterity (2) + Brawl (2) for the character, while the player rolls Dexterity (3) + Dodge (2). Both roll versus a difficulty of 6. The Storyteller scores 3, 3, 4 and 5 — no successes. The player gets 3, 4, 5, 7 and 9 — two successes. Marilyn manages to dodge.]

Marilyn stumbles back and pushes an ornate couch between herself and her attacker.

"Get th' fuck away from me!" she screams as an initial line of defense.

"Oh, darling, please," the woman coos patronizingly. "You're being hysterical. He's just a very... friendly man."

[Advancing events into combat turns; the Storyteller asks all players to make initiative rolls for their characters. He rolls for each of his three characters (the man, the boy and the mother), as well. Marilyn's player adds her Dexterity (3) + Wits (3) to get her initiative rating. She then rolls one die and gets a 4, which she adds to her initiative rating for a total of 10. Kara's player rolls and adds the resulting 6 to her initiative rating of 7 — Dexterity (3) + Wits (4) — for a total of 13. Tony's player adds his initiative rating of 6 to his die result and gets a total of 9. The Storyteller's characters go on 12.

[The players declare their actions in reverse order of initiative. Tony's player announces that his character breaks into a run to get to the tent faster, as he still hasn't reached it. Marilyn attempts to get to the exit. The Storyteller decides that the man attempts to grapple Marilyn again. At the same time, the little boy tries to knock Marilyn down. Kara runs as well, but circles to the other side of the tent from Tony. The Storyteller reminds all players that Kara and Tony don't know what's going on in the tent, but agrees that caution is appropriate.

[Kara and Tony are only moving, so the Storyteller allows them to approach the tent unhindered during the resolution phase.

[Next, the Storyteller characters act. The man and boy gang up on Marilyn. Her player decides to forego her action later in the initiative queue in order to defend against the man, and she makes a successful Willpower roll to do so. The Storyteller won't let her defend against the boy as well, because Marilyn is too intent on the first attacker. They roll again, just like before. The resisted action roll results in Marilyn dodging the father's lunge again.

[The boy tackles Marilyn, but the Storyteller doesn't make it a resisted roll. He needs only a single success on a Strength + Brawl roll. The boy succeeds in his knockdown attempt on Marilyn. The Storyteller then rolls the boy's Strength +1 (3), difficulty 6, to determine whether the boy does any damage. The Storyteller scores 2, 6, 9 — two successes toward bashing damage.

[Marilyn's player may attempt to soak the damage by rolling a dice pool equal to her Stamina (2) versus a difficulty of 6. The player rolls 4, 7. The one success is removed from the damage total, so Marilyn's player marks only one level of damage on her sheet. She puts a "/" in the box next to Bruised.]

Meaty hands reach for Marilyn as the hulk pursues her with single-minded determination. She edges around the couch, keeping it between them until a solid push from one side sends her sprawling on the floor. Blinking, Marilyn looks up into angelic blue eyes.

"You're a bitch," the boy announces, plopping down on Marilyn's chest.

"What?" Marilyn gasps. The boy's father looms over her. His mouth is open, drooling. He has no tongue. He has no teeth. The black ooze of decay covers his palate and drains over his lips.

[Everyone has taken an actions, so the Storyteller calls for the players to roll initiative again. Each adds his or her initiative rating to one die to determine ranks in the initiative queue. The scores fall as follows: Kara (12), Storyteller characters (10), Tony (9) and Marilyn (8). Marilyn's original initiative, 10, suffers a two-point penalty because of her knockdown.

[Marilyn's player announces her intention to scream, attempt to push the boy off her and kick the father. Tony's player decides that he slows down and sneaks around the tent in hopes of overhearing something or finding the entrance. The boy and man try to hold Marilyn down while the mother still remains uninvolved. Kara slows down as well and checks out the other side of the tent.

[In the resolution phase, the Storyteller allows Kara to find the entrance flap to the tent first. He describes what Kara sees when she peeks inside. On the Storyteller characters' actions, neither the boy nor the man does anything, though they will defend against Marilyn later. In order to reduce die rolls, the Storyteller allows Marilyn's scream as a non-action and asks her player to make a resisted Strength (2) + Brawl (3) roll, difficulty 6. The Storyteller rolls the boy's Strength (2) + Brawl (2), also against difficulty 6, and his successes reduce the player's total successes. Marilyn's player rolls and scores three successes. The Storyteller scores none. Marilyn manages to push the child off her.

[Rather than make the player roll to determine whether Marilyn can kick the father, the Storyteller opts to simply allow it for dramatic intensity.]

Marilyn screams. She shoves the boy off with all her strength, then delivers a solid kick to the father's groin. Slipping in the hay, she crab-crawls backward, watching as the man doubles over. The sounds of the carnival seem distant, like a faint music box.

"Bitch!" the mother growls. She has moved, unnoticed, to guard the exit.

[All players roll initiative again. The order this time is Kara, Tony, Marilyn and the Storyteller characters. The players announce their characters' intentions in reverse initiative order and then the resolution phase begins. None of the Storyteller characters do anything other than speak. Marilyn distances herself and grabs the kerosene lantern as a possible weapon. Tony finds Kara at the tent's entrance, drawing her .44 Magnum and firing at the misshapen person standing over Marilyn.

[The Storyteller asks Kara's player to roll Dexterity (3) + Firearms (3) versus a difficulty of 6. She fires twice — multiple shots — and so reduces her pool by two. She rolls four dice for the first attempt and gets two successes. On her second roll, she reduces the pool by another die and rolls three dice, garnering one success. The gun has a Damage rating of 6. Kara's player rolls 13 dice in her damage pool (a total of 12 for the two shots fired and one more die for the extra success achieved on the first attack roll). The damage difficulty is 6. Kara's player gets only three damage successes. The Storyteller knows that the carnival woman cannot soak lethal damage, so he places three "Xs" next to Bruised, Hurt and Injured on her character sheet.

[Sensing an impending finalé, the Storyteller arranges the narrative to make it dramatic, despite the order in which actions are resolved.]

The boy scrambles to his feet and runs to his mother, "I *tried* to pick a nice one, mama. Please don't be mad."

Frozen with horror, Marilyn watches as the woman bends to press purple, swollen lips to the boy's curls. The hand that strokes his cheek is missing two fingers, knuckle bones extending beyond ragged flesh. Her red nightgown drips down a body halted in its decay, breasts melting and stomach sagging. Maggots burrow in a sore on the top of her foot, writhing in the pool of putrescence they've created for themselves. The mother nurtures *all* her children.

Marilyn rolls to her feet and moves deeper into the tent. She holds the kerosene lamp in front of herself. Suddenly, two explosions resound, and the mother's body jerks and jolts, exploding outward at the chest, spraying chunks of rotted flesh and sending a fine mist of puss to test Marilyn's gag reflex.

[The Storyteller asks Marilyn's player to roll Wits (3) + Streetwise (0), difficulty 6, to determine whether Marilyn is startled by the shots. Because Marilyn has no Streetwise Ability, she rolls only three dice in her pool. She botches, scoring 1, 3, 4.]

Startled, Marilyn drops the lamp. It breaks open and fire spreads quickly across the hay. Chaos ensues.

"Mama!" the boy screeches.

The man turns slowly to watch as the mother topples forward into the blazing hay. The fire spreads in seconds, encouraged by the straw, kerosene and abundance of fringes, tassels and canvas.

"Fuckin' freaks!" growls a voice that makes Marilyn want to weep for joy. The irony of Kara's curse is lost on her.

[But the drama isn't over. The Storyteller requests one last initiative roll from everyone. Once the queue is determined, he guides the players through the last part of the scene. The Storytellers' characters take no offensive actions. Kara fires another few rounds into the mother. Tony, seeing that Marilyn heads deeper into the tent, runs around to create an exit for her. As the fire spreads, the Storyteller makes Marilyn's player roll Stamina (2) versus a difficulty of 6 to determine whether the character is overcome by smoke. The roll fails.]

Heart pounding, Marilyn covers her mouth and turns away instinctively as she heads deeper into the tent. She searches frantically for a way out at the back wall. The fire crackles, spreading uncontrollably. Blinded by the smoke, Marilyn runs her hands over the canvas, claws her nails at the seams and eventually falls to her knees as her strength begins to fail.

Suddenly, a long knife stabs through the tent near her face. The last thing she sees is the fire reflected in Tony's blade.

[The Storyteller describes how the man and the little boy are caught in the burning hay and perish there with the mother — assuming they don't rise again from even *this* end. The Storyteller agrees that Kara and Tony can drag Marilyn from the tent and get her home amid the chaos that now permeates the carnival. Now that combat has come to an end, he lets the players return to free roleplay. The characters talk and the Storyteller eventually announces that Marilyn regains consciousness.]

Marilyn awakens with the acrid smell of burned nylon, hay and manure in her nose. She opens her eyes, takes several moments to focus, and finally blinks up at a red-haired young woman. Her throat burns and her lungs ache as she coughs hoarsely.

Kara frowns, offering Marilyn a glass of water. "What the hell were you thinkin', going in there alone?"

Marilyn sits up to take the water.

"Leave her alone, Kara," Tony drawls from across the room.

Kara turns to glare at him. The sway of her hair reminds Marilyn of the fire.

"Look, you back-assward idiot," Kara says, sounding pissed, "she coulda gotten us killed." Her Brooklyn vowels come out when she's pissed.

"But she didn't, did she?" Tony has a way of making everything he says sound like a slow declaration of mystical truth. He shifts as if the conversation is over and his attention is better directed elsewhere.

"I'm sorry," Marilyn apologizes quietly, voice rough. "It was just a kid. I figured I could handle it."

"Yeah, well you were wrong, weren't ya?" grumbles Kara. "I was all th' way down by the Ferris wheel an' I could smell his shit. Good thing I saw ya."

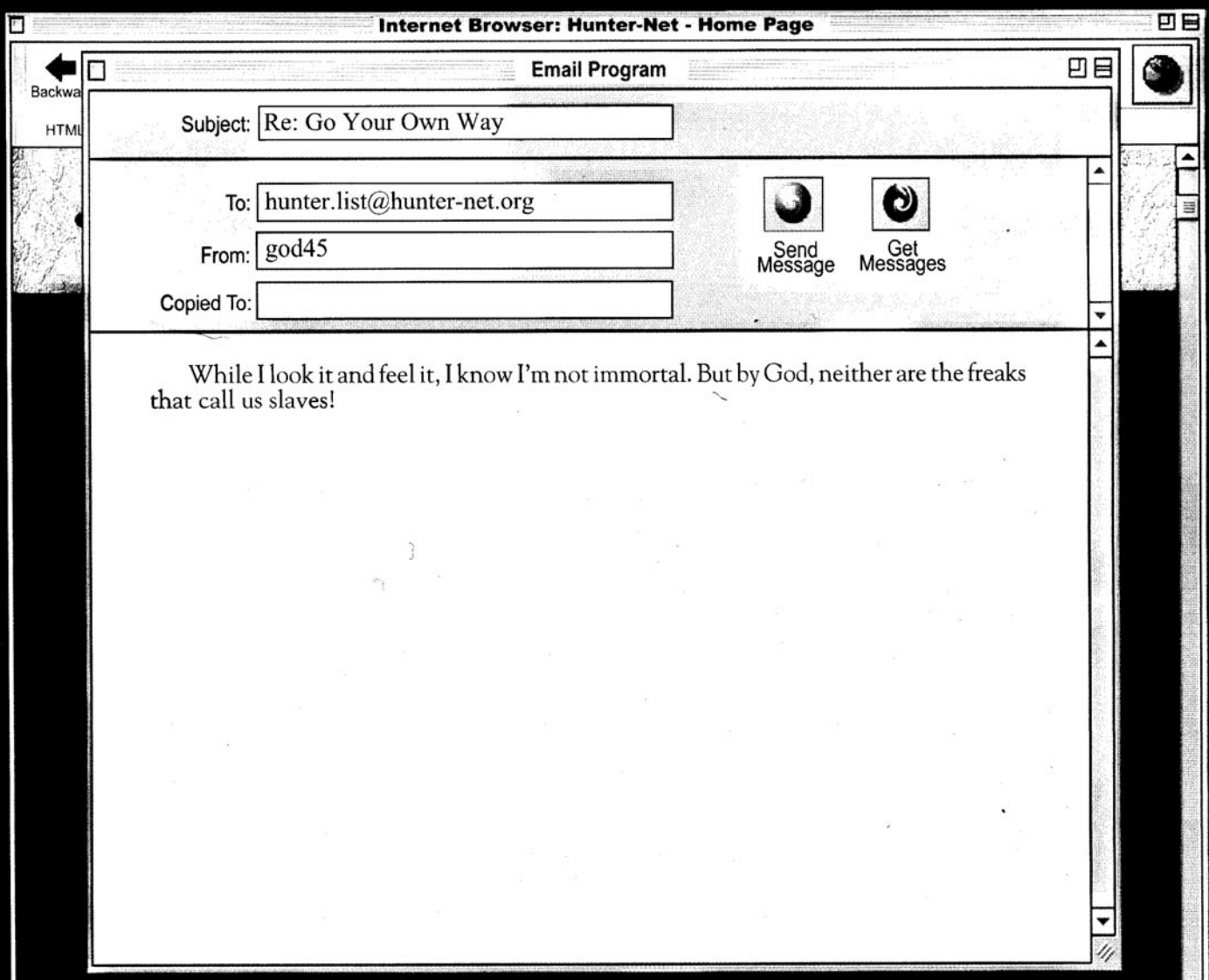
Marilyn glares up at Kara. "Look. Back off, okay! Yeah, you saved my life. Thanks. But that doesn't give you the right to chew me out. You make mistakes, too." Marilyn doesn't mention specifics, but both know what she alludes to.

Kara growls and makes a fist, ready to retaliate when Tony intervenes.

"Cut it out!" Tony shouts. He stares them both down, then lowers his voice to a conversational tone. "Where there's one pack of those things, there's bound to be more. Tomorrow night we go back to that carnival, and this time, we stick together. Anyone who wanders off alone dies alone."

"That's right," Kara grunts at Marilyn. She points a finger at the other woman, "You just remember that!"

Marilyn lifts her hands in frustrated surrender and sighs, "I got it. I got it." She shakes her head and stands carefully, "I'll get on the computer and see what I can find out about that carnival...."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From: god45
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Send Message
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While I look it and feel it, I know I'm not immortal. But by God, neither are the freaks that call us slaves!

CHAPTER 8: THE TRUTH (STORYTELLING)

Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly...
— Job 4:18

You have stories to tell. Everyone does. In **Hunter**, stories can be easy to tell because, at their core, they're about ordinary people like you and me. We can identify with the businessmen, students and artists who live in the World of Darkness. Their experiences aren't terribly far from our own. Throughout their lives, these people put their faith in accepted truths. The sky is blue. The only guarantees in life are birth, death and taxes. Monsters are figments of imagination.

When these fundamental, accepted ideas are undermined, proven wrong, the bottom falls out of reality itself. A person exposed suddenly to the truth has many stories to tell, but now they don't come easily. Now they're terrifying, because monsters exist.

This chapter is perhaps the most important in this rulebook. Although you need other chapters to establish the setting of the game, provide rules for creating characters, and establish systems for resolving events, the Storytelling chapter explains how everything comes together. The imbued don't understand the real world in which they've lived all along. Players may be familiar with other Storyteller games, but they don't fully know how **Hunter** fits into the World of Darkness. This chapter empowers you, the Storyteller, with everything you need to know to create an imposing, frightening setting in which normal people come face to face with the stuff of nightmares.

This chapter tells you how to run games and tell stories with **Hunter: The Reckoning**. You learn how to create a story and chronicle. You're taught how to stage a prelude for imbued characters. You learn the basic truths of the Messengers. It's all right here. Just try to keep it from your players.

A Practice Story

Close your eyes for a moment. Picture yourself after a hard day at school or work. It's a Friday, so you eat out, either alone or with family or friends. Picture all the details of the evening, the things you take for granted because they surround you constantly. The traffic. The sleek sports car alongside you. The dirty silverware at the restaurant. The couple sitting at the table in the corner. The friendly waitress. The smudged menu. It's an ordinary night in an ordinary world.

It's when the waitress comes to take your order, when you look up, that you truly see the couple in the corner for the first time. The man isn't *alone*. You can see *inside* him, sense the chilling, malignant spirit that hides in his body and keeps his own beleaguered soul at bay. The woman is going to die. The spirit plans to use its host to murder her — revenge for a past indiscretion. And an innocent man will be charged with the crime.

You don't stop to question this startling revelation. You simply *know* it to be true, as surely as you know the sun will set. Suddenly, your usual surroundings don't matter anymore. Everything you've always believed in or taken for granted is unimportant in the face of a simple fact: Evil exists. It controls helpless people and is bent on murder. Someone has to do something. *You* have to do something.

The waitress is bowled aside. The smudged menu falls to the floor. Dirty silverware flies through the air. You act out against the corruption that hides amid mankind, and that has done so for ages.

Can you see the couple standing up to leave? Can you hear the waitress asking you what you want to eat? Your companion asking you what you're looking at? The chaos that ensues when you act?

Creating these mental images is part of storytelling. In **Hunter**, these stories are told with a group of people around a table. The players bring their complete and well-defined characters to the game. You, as Storyteller, bring the world and events that surround and confront the characters — the developments that inspire them to *do something*. Together, you tell tales of fear, tragedy, resolution and hope. Together, you tell stories about hunters.

Group Storytelling

Forget about the pages of rules and handfuls of dice. Close the book, turn out the lights and tell me a story about horrifying sights and grim determination. I'll tell you about a hunter — a once-ordinary person made to confront the horrors of the real world, and empowered to respond to them. She has talents and weaknesses, fears and motivations. You tell me what kind of challenges she faces, what rewards or perils come her way. You plan the twists and turns the story takes, and I tell you how my hunter navigates them. Only you know how the story ultimately ends, but only I know how the character arrives there. Along the way, the work you put into the story gives my hunter the chance to grow and develop, and her actions breathe life into the world you have created.

That is the challenge of storytelling. **Hunter: The Reckoning** is about discovering absolute reality and coming to grips with it. Bringing the human soul to bear against forces far more powerful. Staring unflinchingly into the abyss. Understanding for the first time in a lifetime that the greatest evils committed are not necessarily wrought by humans hands, and declaring enough is enough. Making a personal commitment to take back what has always been denied mankind, and winning humanity as a whole its freedom.

In short, **Hunter** is about characters and how they develop — or collapse — in the face of horror and obsession. Can family be held together when nights are dedicated to stalking and confronting monstrosities? Must all semblance of a normal life be abandoned for the war against the supernatural to finally be won? Is even the ultimate sacrifice futile against nightcrawling hordes? And if life is preserved, must identity be sacrificed instead? As Storyteller, you draw on the characters' backgrounds, hopes and ambitions to create stories that challenge their — and their players' — convictions and beliefs.

As a result, assuming the role of a Storyteller in a **Hunter** game is very demanding. Careful thought and background work are required to build character-driven chronicles and stories. You must create a world that is a nightmare reflection of our own, enticing and repellent, exhilarating and horrifying. You must evoke the thrill of mystifying power, and a fear of what might happen if the characters ever lose control. And you can't let the characters just keep to themselves, hoping to hide from what they know and have become. The night air is thick with danger and intrigue, as nagging doubts about their own sanity compel the imbued to understand their experiences, as visions of unfathomable evil assail the senses, as hunters seek allies against the enemy, and as monsters come in search of those humans who would dare oppose them.

Storytelling sounds like a lot to manage all at once, and it is at first. Fortunately, you don't have to do it all yourself. The secret to successful storytelling is, ironically, the work of the players. Fulfilling the expectations and interests of a chronicle's players is the first trick to creating the game. Then — if the chronicle and its overall story have been developed carefully — the actions of the characters, both good and bad, have consequences that in turn spawn further stories. Never forget: The more the players are involved with what happens in a chronicle, the less work you must take upon yourself. You aren't supposed to do it all alone. You should have as much fun with the game as the players, and this chapter details how.

This chapter illustrates the process of creating and running a **Hunter** chronicle, and it offers advice for making the most out of the individual stories that perpetuate the chronicle. Building a detailed and cohesive background, a world for the characters to hunt in, begins

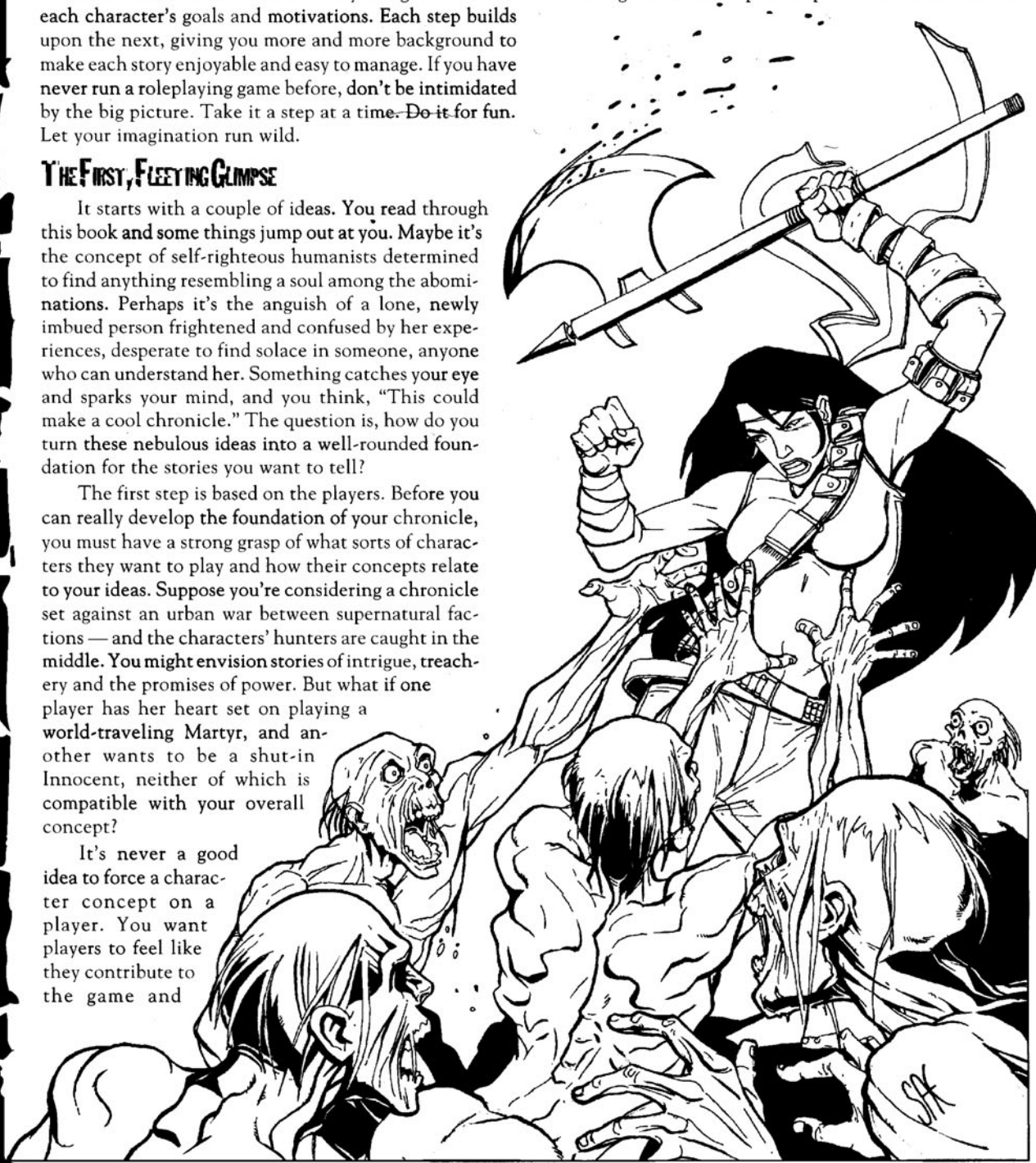
with input from your players and your own ideas for the overall story you would like to tell. Once you've decided on the details of the world, the next step is having players create characters to fill it, again keeping in mind the kind of chronicle you want to create. After the characters are in place, you can write the chronicle in earnest, working out the events that move the overall story along and draw on each character's goals and motivations. Each step builds upon the next, giving you more and more background to make each story enjoyable and easy to manage. If you have never run a roleplaying game before, don't be intimidated by the big picture. Take it a step at a time. Do it for fun. Let your imagination run wild.

The First, Fleeting Glimpse

It starts with a couple of ideas. You read through this book and some things jump out at you. Maybe it's the concept of self-righteous humanists determined to find anything resembling a soul among the abominations. Perhaps it's the anguish of a lone, newly imbued person frightened and confused by her experiences, desperate to find solace in someone, anyone who can understand her. Something catches your eye and sparks your mind, and you think, "This could make a cool chronicle." The question is, how do you turn these nebulous ideas into a well-rounded foundation for the stories you want to tell?

The first step is based on the players. Before you can really develop the foundation of your chronicle, you must have a strong grasp of what sorts of characters they want to play and how their concepts relate to your ideas. Suppose you're considering a chronicle set against an urban war between supernatural factions — and the characters' hunters are caught in the middle. You might envision stories of intrigue, treachery and the promises of power. But what if one player has her heart set on playing a world-traveling Martyr, and another wants to be a shut-in Innocent, neither of which is compatible with your overall concept?

It's never a good idea to force a character concept on a player. You want players to feel like they contribute to the game and play characters in whom they are interested. At this point comes some amount of negotiation and compromise. Perhaps you can interest them in your backdrop of political conflicts and double-dealing, but you must shift the focus of the chronicle to the characters' struggles to *avoid* the warring factions. Meanwhile, the characters pursue individual agendas. The important point is to make sure that



your ideas and players' expectations are in synch before you even begin to develop your chronicle. This way you can add players' ideas to your own and make your job much easier in the long run.

Once everyone agrees on the general idea of the chronicle, the players can create their characters and you can create the world in which they hunt. It's worthwhile to do both things simultaneously because it allows your collective ideas to play off each other. The synergy might also point you in directions that you might not have considered otherwise.

Suppose, for example, that a player wants her character to have been a police officer before being imbued. You could take this idea and expand on it: The character had aspirations of becoming a detective and busted her ass both on the job and after hours to win promotions. However, it was only after rising through the ranks that she discovered the corruption undermining her precinct. Fellow detectives were taking payola, doing favors and planting evidence for someone outside the force. The character's imbuing occurred when she came face to face with inhuman pawns of that shadowplayer — and the woman realized the awful truth about her peers and commanding officers. She turned against them and quit the force, intent on her own personal style of justice.

To add yet another level of conflict, you might decide that the power at work behind the police has decided the character can't be allowed to live — or at least must be prevented from revealing what she's learned. That's when the character discovers her younger sister missing, only to find her in the possession of nightstalking horrors. The girl has become one of *them*!

Having established these plot basics, you can encourage the player to further develop the local police department and the character's new relationship with her sister. The player provides details such as a history and important personalities that you blend into your world. This lets her flesh out her character, allows her to contribute to the game as a whole and gives you valuable resource material for your chronicle. Get your players to go into a lot of detail when creating their characters. Sit down with them during the creation process, and brainstorm about their origins, then make the most of the information they come up with. Players can provide you with a whole host of characters, situations and conflicts that will be of use later in your game.

It's also important to take the characters' Backgrounds into account and develop them in detail when establishing the foundations of your game. Newly imbued hunters still have very strong ties to their previous lives. Encourage the purchase of Allies, Contacts, Influence and the like, then brainstorm with players to flesh them out. Where do a character's Resources come from? Is she an heiress? Did she win the lottery? Did she stumble onto a drug deal gone sour and steal the bloodstained cash? What effect do these circumstances have on who the character is and her place in the chronicle?

Likewise, allies or contacts are more than just dots on a character sheet — they are people with their own feelings and emotions. Suppose a player wants her character to have a mid-level contact in a hospital. Who is this contact, and how did the character establish this relationship? The contact might be the character's uncle, a doctor who has a habit of asking pointed questions about the character's lifestyle and frequent injuries.

Each Background gives an added dimension to character concept and contains a wealth of ideas to inspire you. How do the characters handle the sudden and irrevocable separation from everything they have ever known or loved? Do they fake their deaths or simply walk away from their former lives? Do the characters leave loved ones who simply cannot accept their disappearance, and who go to any lengths to find the lost soul? Torn by love yet knowing what might happen one night if monsters trail them home, can the characters stay away from spouses or children?

These situations, some of the first dilemmas that characters must face, can influence their actions in many subtle ways. While it is always tempting to gloss over the particulars of each character's imbuing and get on with "being a hunter," doing so leaves out a vital dimension in a character's struggle to maintain her identity. Exploring characters' past lives provides you with a fertile field from which to draw ideas and supporting characters.

The Prelude

Combining the players' characters with your story and setting ideas provides the basis for your game. Where you take that game is up to your troupe, and several ideas and storytelling techniques for running stories are provided later in this chapter. However, before your chronicle can run, it has to walk. The first step of all is the prelude.

The prelude is easily the most important event in your characters' lives, and it's one of the most telling moments of your chronicle. The prelude is the "short story" that precedes your main narrative, the chronicle. It's typically a one-shot or one-night game session in which you and the players gather to explain how the characters transform from everyday people with normal lives into haunted outsiders with terrifying insight and bizarre powers.

The prelude is a roleplaying session about characters' human lives, before the moment of their exposure to the unknown. Players get a taste of who their characters are, what their ordinary lives are like, and then events conspire to change characters' lives forever. The once-unassuming characters are imbued. They witness a monster firsthand, discover that everything they've always believed in is false, and are granted startling abilities with which to react. When a person sees a walking abomination for herself and realizes their pervasiveness, her world can never be the same again.

That moment of awakening haunts her till her dying day, which may be closer than she'd like to imagine.

The prelude is also fundamental to your games and stories because it sets the tone for all events to follow. The characters' reactions to the horror put before them indicate their creeds. What missions they pursue against the enemy are thus determined, whether to wipe monsters from the face of the earth, help the deserving back from the brink, or simply to understand how monsters can be and what they mean for mankind.

Hunters start as regular folks. They don't have ambitions to heal the world. They aren't crusaders. They aren't champions of common people. They aren't do-gooders. They're a little cynical, a little gullible, a little apathetic. They worry about things that will never happen, while ignoring their real problems. They're ordinary.

Regular people aren't prepared for an experience that virtually cracks open their skulls and pours in a poisonous dose of terrifying revelation. They have not fasted, meditated or flagellated themselves in pursuit of mystic knowledge. Instead, this awareness seizes them, forces itself into their minds and overwhelms their "common sense" understanding of reality.

In a single instant, a person's mindset turns from, "What's the quickest way through this traffic?" to "Monsters are real!"

It's from this revelation that the drama of **Hunter: The Reckoning** derives. This truth is the one that all hunters must accept. This is the truth they suddenly *know*.

There's a word for such innate comprehension, such revealed knowledge: gnosis. Many ancient religions are based on gnosis. Worshippers meditate, take peyote or dance themselves to exhaustion in an effort to make themselves receptive to supernatural knowledge. When that insight comes, it's not in the form of polemic or a reasoned debate: They *just know*, the way you know when your arm hurts or your back itches. The revelation isn't a theory, hypothesis or possibility. It cannot be communicated through words, pictures or gestures. When you have the experience, you know. It is obviously true, above question. If you don't have the revelation, you can never really understand.

Schizophrenics describe similar experiences. So do hunters.

In the World of Darkness, most people have understood at one time or another — usually during childhood — that monsters exist. Parents' instruction and society's imperatives stifle those fears and thoughts, however. A conscious effort is made to ignore the truth, perhaps in a subconscious effort to remain sane. Instinct is suppressed.

For hunters at the moment of imbuing, that instinct is freed and empowered. Truth changes: The myth of monsters becomes reality, and the reality of society becomes myth. The normal world is shown to be a veil of lies stretched thin across a reality we once knew, always feared and always denied.

A life of safety is a dream. Hunters are rudely awakened.

Storytelling the Prelude

You haven't seen your brother in a few years — not since the big fight that cut a rift through your family. You made attempts to patch things up, but he never reciprocated. Usually, he just hung up on you. That's why you're surprised to hear from him at now. It's late; you were asleep when the phone range. You recognize his voice immediately: "Joe, I'm in trouble. Big trouble!"

Each player undergoes the prelude alone or in a group with the Storyteller. A one-on-one format helps concentrate the feeling that the prelude is very personal, that it's the character's past and his alone. A group prelude creates a sense of community as disparate people inevitably meet under circumstances that none of them could ever have imagined. Simply turn from player to player in rapid succession to relay the events they experience and to learn their reactions.

Group preludes are ideal if you want characters to be aware of or know other hunters from the outset of the game. The imbuing and all the knowledge that comes with it is bewildering, shocking and disorienting. Characters who have thus far lived mundane lives, and who suddenly witness the supernatural, seek to come to grips with their experiences. When other *uninitiated* people simply don't understand, the fellow chosen become the imbued's only recourse. The group prelude therefore establishes an ideal paradigm for such self-understanding. Sooner or later, characters who witness a nightstalker together turn to each other for comfort and meaning. When they do, you know your game is truly ready to get under way.

It's okay to take a heavy hand in controlling prelude events. Give players plenty of decisions to make, and make them rapid-fire — make players think quickly, so they act instinctively in keeping with their characters. The point is, you want players to identify with their human creations before naiveté is ripped from the characters forever.

It's a November afternoon. It's already sliding into twilight. Your brother said meet him in the park, but it's been half an hour and he still hasn't shown up. You hear a dog bark somewhere in the distance, and the sound makes you painfully aware that you're all alone — there isn't another human being within sight. Except one, maybe — a derelict, stumbling along the path toward you. What do you do?

During the prelude, let the players explore the setting as well as the rules. Have them try out a few rolls. Let them swap a few Traits around if it becomes clear during roleplaying that Traits don't accurately reflect character (although you shouldn't allow such rearrangement if players just try to create unstoppable superheroes). Explore characters' environment in detail. Find out why they have the Backgrounds they do — introduce allies as characters, or visit jobs (if any) to reinforce how rent money is earned.

It may seem odd to play through perfectly mundane scenes in the prelude, but these actually build a sense of normalcy that is shattered when the supernatural takes the

stage. Once you juxtapose the tedium of mortal life with horrific exposure and subsequent rebirth as a hunter, the dramatic tension of being imbued is exhilarating.

As you describe things, let players interrupt with ideas and details concerning events as they occur. Remember, you're telling this story together; the players are your partners. You can also throw in details that provoke the players' emotions — "Your girlfriend has tears in her eyes as she tells you that she's pregnant." Once the character becomes a hunter, he may no longer be there for her or their baby, despite his best intentions. **Hunter** is a horror game at heart, and the players must feel a profound sense of loss to truly know what it's like to be condemned to a new, startling life.

You glance toward the shabby man as he staggers closer. You don't even realize your brother has arrived until he lays a hand on your shoulder. You almost leap out of your skin. He doesn't waste time with "hellos": "Joe, you gotta help me. They're after me. I was doing some work for some... people... and it kinda went wrong. Now they've sent this thing after me." You're about to calm him down when a broad shadow falls between you and the park lamp. That's when you see it.

Finally, a character's imbuing should be roleplayed to the hilt — this moment, more than anything else, defines how she is changed by existence as a hunter. Play up the sensation of being watched. Build the tension of an unseen predator stalking the unwitting character. Although the players know what's coming, they shouldn't know exactly how. Describe the attack in great detail so that it seems all the more real and frightening. You want the players to remember the imbuing for a long time.

Bringing Characters Together

Part of running a group prelude requires bringing characters together for the extraordinary events that unfold. There are numerous ways to do this, and you will undoubtedly choose the way that best suits your storytelling style, the needs of your chronicle and the characters in question. Get to know each player's character when he is created. Where does he work? Where does he live? Does he frequent any places — a business, gym, park, restaurant or bar? Learning these details offers setting options for your prelude; you can coordinate the imbuing to occur in a place a character tends to go in normal life.

Look for a locale that could be common to all the characters. Perhaps they all pass through the same intersection on their way to work. Or they ride the same train. Or they frequent the same sandwich shop. If a common locale isn't immediately forthcoming, you may want to invent one on some characters' behalf — "You're halfway home from work when you remember that you have to pick up your dry cleaning."

Before the actual imbuing event can occur, address each player in turn to explain how his character's day has gone. It might have been rewarding or relaxing, perhaps the last enjoyable one he'll have for the rest of his life, and one he'll look back on fondly for some time. Or his day may have been infuriating or frustrating, whether because of work or traffic or an illness. That tension is only compounded when evil incarnate emerges.

Dealing with each character in turn, but in a group environment, combines the intimacy of the individual prelude with the belonging of a community introduction. Lead each character through the string of events that conspires to bring him to the fateful spot where his life will change forever. However, you don't have to draw a straight line to the "scene of the crime." Players undoubtedly know what's in store for their characters, but they don't know when, where or how it will occur. Build tension by engineering some near misses and close encounters. Two characters might share a cab, but they both get to their destinations uneventfully. Late-nighters may stop at the same grocery store for food or beer. Tease the players with what you all know is coming.

Once you've created sufficient tension and the players have a solid feel for their characters through roleplaying, you can finally expose them to a walking horror. They are all in the same place at the same time when the Messengers act and reveal a monster for all to see.

Depending on how heavily you wish to contrive the characters' coordination, the Messengers may impose their will over the characters' fate. These beings are immeasurably powerful forces at work in the universe. They bring their will to bear on individual people who can become weapons in a war against the supernatural on Earth. If you wish to suggest that some unknowable force works on the characters to control their fate, the chosen, no matter how divergent, can find themselves together at the same place and time by almost any unlikely means. A stockbroker's engine might break down on the highway near a bad part of town. He's forced to pull off and seek help. A homeless person lives beneath the overpass. Meanwhile, a sports-star makes a charitable appearance in the local community center. The odds of these three people meeting are astronomical, and yet they do, almost as if fate plays its hand. The results only reinforce that the imbuing is an imperative to do something about the supernatural, and to resist it would defy the powers that be.

Priori Versus A Priori

There are several different ways to approach the prelude and imbuing as Storyteller. Players may be encouraged to create characters as is traditional in roleplaying games: Everything from previous life to current existence is defined through Traits purchased and ratings bought. In **Hunter**, that means letting players decide their Attribute scores, Ability ratings and Background points — the elements that chart characters' lives before the imbuing. However, this approach also means letting players decide their characters' creeds, Virtue ratings and edges — the mysterious aspects of their lives that follow the imbuing

— all before the game begins. The result is a complete **Hunter** character, already designed at the outset of the first game session.

With this take on character creation, in which players have complete foreknowledge of what changes befall their characters, the prelude is simply about narrative events that let players shift from depicting normal people to righteous champions. Players know what kinds of hunters they want to play. They simply stage reactions to the monsters revealed according to creed, and the hunters and the chronicle are born.

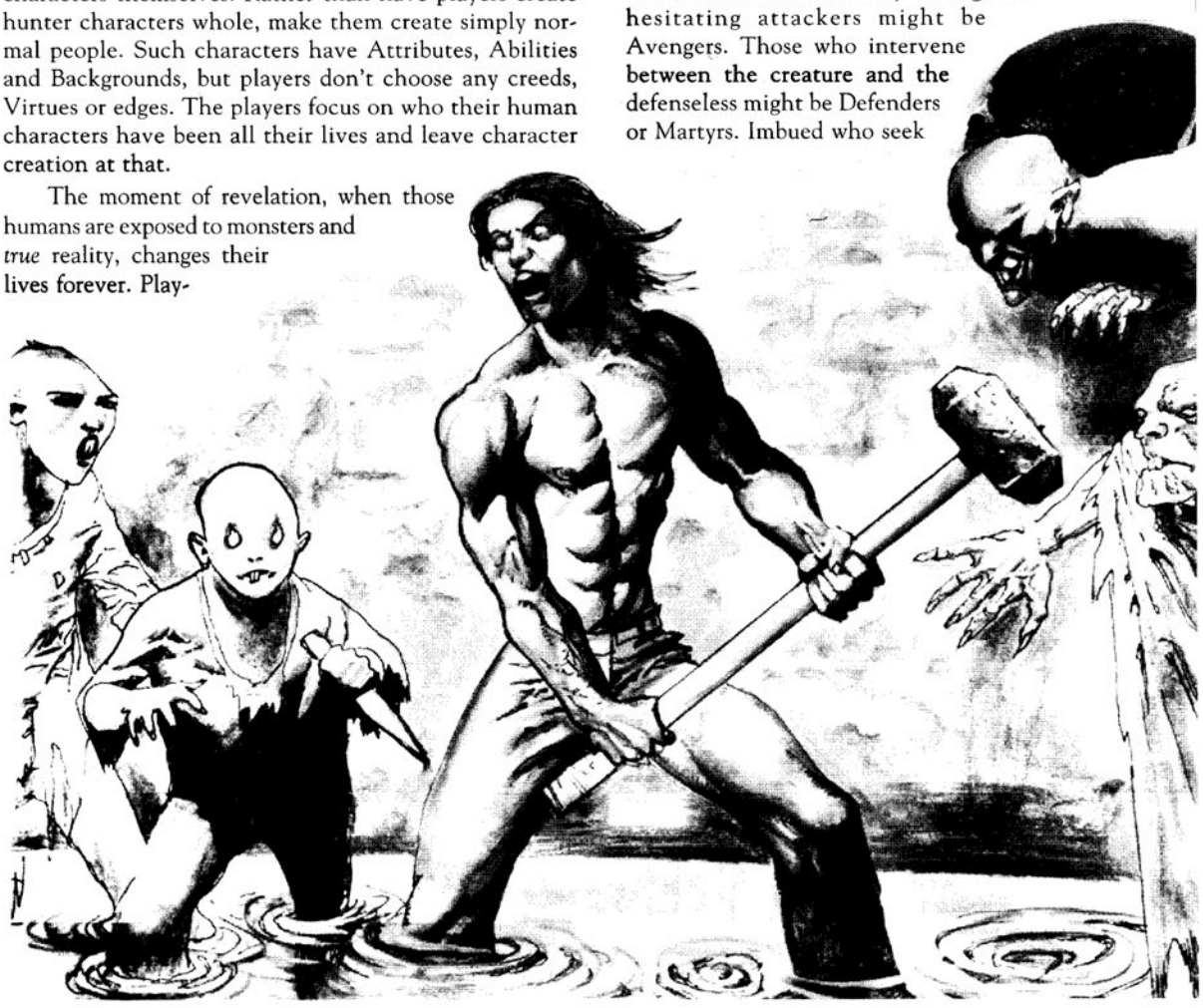
There's nothing wrong with this conventional approach to character creation and the prelude. Players know who their characters are in advance and can roleplay them honestly and accurately. You also know what kinds of hunters they are and can adapt your chronicle to suit their identities and self-chosen missions in the war.

However, there's another way to tackle the prelude that involves more mystery, horror and suspense, and that is perhaps more in keeping with the events that occur to characters themselves. Rather than have players create hunter characters whole, make them create simply normal people. Such characters have Attributes, Abilities and Backgrounds, but players don't choose any creeds, Virtues or edges. The players focus on who their human characters have been all their lives and leave character creation at that.

The moment of revelation, when those humans are exposed to monsters and *true* reality, changes their lives forever. Players know what's coming *in general*. They're playing **Hunter** after all, so they know some confrontation with the supernatural is imminent. However, players don't know how or where it will happen, what the circumstances will be, or what creature will be faced. Having created only *human* characters, players are therefore forced to roleplay *human* responses to the monstrosities presented before them.

Confronted suddenly by the walking dead, most people collapse, flee or carry on in a desperate, subconscious effort to remain sane. Would-be imbued aren't so lucky. They have the will, courage, fortitude, compassion or curiosity to see the supernatural for what it is, and react according to their innermost identity. The angry or furious might attack outright, the naive might wonder if the creature is in pain, the inquisitive might wonder what that *thing* could be.

In a prelude of strictly human characters, each character's reaction to the scene is based on how he or she is roleplayed. Ideally, the players know their characters well enough and can improvise appropriate responses to the abomination. Their actions indicate the creeds to which each character may belong. Unhesitating attackers might be Avengers. Those who intervene between the creature and the defenseless might be Defenders or Martyrs. Imbued who seek



help or innovative solutions to avert harm could be Visionaries. Characters might also gain edges congruent with the creeds they fulfill.

The result of the "impromptu" prelude is that you establish the premise for the characters' proximity to and confrontation with the unknown. The players take it from there. Their choices determine who and what their characters become thereafter.

Prelude Setting

Whether your Hunter prelude involves one character or the entire group, wholly created characters or hapless humans who become something more, you must decide where the event takes place. Setting can be vital to determining how imbuing events unfold. If the characters all happen to be together in an open space, prelude events can go almost any way. Imagine characters scattered throughout a carnival when one of the circus freaks is revealed as a little more freakish than the rest. In such a large, open space, characters have a variety of options for actions. Human characters played realistically are probably more likely to run from a beast than they are to confront or address it.

Remember, however, that the imbuing imparts a particular imperative that is hard to resist, regardless of setting. The imbued feel a powerful sense of urgency imposed by the Messengers (or the characters' own innate sense of responsibility) when faced with the supernatural. This imperative demands action. In the brief instant of a creature's appearance, each character knows he must respond, whether because "God tells me to," "It's the right thing to do," Someone has to do something," or "I was born for this moment." Characters might also sense affirming assurance that getting involved is the best of all choices. To act might conjure sentiments comparable to those of great past achievements, such as confidence like that at graduation, contentment like that of marriage or victory like that of winning a race. Thus, even though running in fear might seem the most reasonable course of action, and the setting of the event may allow it, some compulsion probably keeps the characters there and motivates them to respond (and maybe running in fear has its own application if the player provides a rationale and insight into his character's intentions).

The contrast to the wide-open prelude setting is the contained one. Imagine a red-eye plane flight that experiences delays before landing. As the horizon grows warm with the rising sun, one of the passengers goes berserk, exhibiting feral features and an absolutely insane demand for shelter. All of the characters are aboard that flight for one reason or another. Now they face a raving madman with the apparent strength of 10 people. In that confined space, no one has any option but to respond to the creature, no matter their personal motives. If this maniac isn't controlled, people will be killed and the crew may lose control. In this case, a closed prelude setting assures that characters take action and fulfill their imbued destinies.

Assigning Creeds

The creeds are each indicated with the following kinds of actions. Now, an Avenger doesn't always have to attack, attack, attack; a Defender might do the same under the right circumstances. Ultimately, assigning creeds to otherwise normal human characters involves Storyteller and player agreement. These are simply guidelines.

An *Avenger* typically takes direct action against a revealed monster, and does so more out of vengeance, personal satisfaction, rage or a need to right a wrong than for the protection of anyone in immediate danger.

A *Defender* takes aggressive action because of a desire to save someone who is in immediate danger. There can be a fine line between an Avenger and Defender. Create prelude events that allow for protecting and attacking and see which characters take. Or simply ask players why their characters behave as they do to distinguish between Avengers and Defenders.

A *Judge* might not take immediate action himself, but does try to direct others in their own responses. Commands are not likely to be as imaginative (as those of a Visionary might be) as they are direct. A Judge is still a Zealot who strives to see monsters put down, but usually on a need-to-kill basis; a creature that demonstrates a capacity for good could be spared if others can help save it. Judges try to weigh the greatest possible good in any situation.

An *Innocent* preaches understanding of others, even monsters, and does not abide an abomination's destruction unless it displays wanton evil. An Innocent is fully prepared to speak to a creature and strive to understand its feelings and motivations. The thought of being hurt or killed typically doesn't occur or matter to these hunters.

A *Martyr* gives himself to the cause for its own sake. He doesn't necessarily protect anyone as a Defender does, and may not have any fierce passion against a creature as an Avenger might. A Martyr could divert a monster's attention to himself or sacrifice something he holds dear to stop it from accomplishing a goal. Whereas a Judge seeks to find the greatest good in a situation, the Martyr strives to make it happen, even at his own expense.

A *Redeemer* is willing to communicate with a monster as an Innocent is. However, a Redeemer seeks to know what the creature's intentions are as a reflection of its spirit. He is prepared to allow the beast a chance to reconsider its actions, and to strike against it if the thing displays no remorse or concern. A Redeemer might say a prayer for the soul of a damned monster, or might find excuses for a deserving monster's behavior.

A *Visionary* usually studies every situation, questions assumed truths and looks for creative ways around problems. These hunters are even known to respond aloud to Herald messages in hopes of gaining more information from the beings, but usually to no avail. To them, the voice of the Messengers is often a disembodied *other*. Visionaries hope to understand monsters at their core in hopes of resolving the creatures' differences with humanity.

The type of setting you choose is simply a matter of how hard you want to drive the point home to players: You must do something! Everything else follows naturally from there.

If characters have qualms about getting involved in events with monsters, which is perfectly reasonable given the circumstances, you always have the opportunity of introducing the human factor: defenseless human, that is. Monsters lurk everywhere among humanity — in parks, subway tunnels, office buildings, even family homes. When they are suddenly and dangerously exposed to certain mortal onlookers, those creatures will do whatever they must to restore their anonymity or more likely to escape. If that means harming ordinary people as a distraction, or simply as a result of rage or fear, so be it. Protecting the helpless is often motivation for people to act, performing deeds that even they wonder at afterward.

When characters are imbued they are typically the only ones made aware of the supernatural at their locale. Regular people carry on oblivious, as they have all their lives. Thus, it's not really the revealed monsters from whom the defenseless run, it's from the imbued who, for all intents and purposes, "go mad" against unseen forces or objects. Uninitiated people typically flee these insane riots. And if onlookers actually see anything, they usually rationalize it for their own unconscious protection or misunderstand exactly what happened.

The masses are therefore props to use as you will in a prelude. They can be victims who motivate the imbued to respond, or they can be obstructions that make imbued or monster efforts more difficult. In some cases, they're even hapless individuals whom hunters, particularly Defenders and the Merciful, seek to protect.

When deciding the setting of your prelude, consider the role of the oblivious masses. They can be your best tools for inspiring actions, creating turmoil, and providing a litmus test for the creeds to which hunters may belong.

Monsters Everywhere

There are all kinds of inhuman, unliving monsters in the World of Darkness. What kind should the characters perceive or be exposed to at the imbuing? The Heralds, as cosmological forces, tend to engineer the situations in which hunters are born. They don't want their foot soldiers to be destroyed before they've even begun to fight. The Messengers therefore tend to construct events to reveal individual, weak, injured, cowardly, inexperienced or stupid creatures at the moment of imbuing — monsters that empowered humans have a chance of defeating or driving off.

The walking dead, particularly the mindless, are the most commonly encountered creatures. Many hunters report being awoken to the real world by the sight of a shambling corpse — something that is clearly wrong, an offense to the living. Ghosts and hideous vampires are also good prelude choices; they *can't* be alive and certainly *can't* be normal. Avoid initiating hunters with beings that could be mistaken for people. A sorcerer or a shapechanger in human form isn't a good choice; there's nothing ostensibly unusual about those beings until they themselves prove otherwise. Also avoid spirits that possess people unless you take pains to depict how heinous a spirit is, as in the sample story earlier in this chapter. Characters already have enough to contend with given their freakish powers and the sights before them. Trying to spare a human host to get at its possessor may be too much.

After the walking dead, spirits and vampires are frequent encounters. Warlocks, shapechangers and goblins are only rarely encountered at imbuings (unless you really want to use them), because they're often too enigmatic to understand as a possible enemy, and they can be extremely powerful; too much for a handful of baffled people to contend with, anyway.

Stick to a single creature in your prelude, unless you want to introduce more for dramatic or narrative effect. Perhaps a group of zombies, intent on a mission for its master, isn't interested in the characters, so its members don't put up much of a fight. Maybe two or more vampires fight amongst themselves and would rather flee intruding humans than continue their battle. Perhaps a potential Judge must choose with whom to side in the battle, if anyone. Ultimately, three monsters is the most you should use in your prelude. Any more and even imbued characters are likely to flee rather than do something about the situation.

Characters' sudden awareness of monsters at the imbuing is more a matter of otherworldy intervention than it is the application of any Conviction points. Second sight and the defenses that come with it are available to chosen characters thanks to the grace of the Messengers. No Conviction points need be spent for second sight in the prelude. The insight is more a narrative tool than a game mechanic.

This sort-of "divine intervention" quickly becomes apparent if the imbued aren't the only ones to notice things are amiss. The monster on the scene can also be aware that it has become apparent to certain humans. It might catch the disbelieving stares of the chosen. It might sense the chill influence of the Messengers. Or the creature's own powers of illusion or deception may simply fail, leaving it exposed for all to see (but only a handful to recognize).

How the creature responds to such exposure depends on its nature or needs. It may try to flee further contact with humans. It may try to kill everyone in the area to cover its tracks. It may do nothing, hoping to lose itself in the anonymity of an unsuspecting crowd. Certainly the characters' response determines the success of the monster's efforts. If nothing else, the creature senses that something has changed about the secretive world it inhabits and controls. The masses are waking up and taking notice!

Herald Contact

The nature and purpose of the Heralds is detailed elsewhere in this chapter. Right now, you need to know how these forces contact a newly imbued character and what kinds of messages they relate in the prelude. The Heralds seek to create warriors to fight back against the supernatural menace that plagues the world and humanity. They look for people with the spirit, will, resolve, conscience and responsibility to face monsters' existence and try to do something about it, whether to fight back, save the creatures' souls or break the things' tyrannical grip.

Hunters are therefore tools of higher powers, but are not necessarily handled with care. The Messengers don't coddle their creations. They lead them to the enemy and pull the wool from their eyes. Whether humans thus exposed can truly handle the experience is up to them alone. The Heralds simply build the fire that forges the tools they need.

Herald messages at the imbuing tend to be blunt, shocking, disorienting and cryptic. If the chosen can't handle the impact or deduce what's required thereafter, that person isn't hunter stock (and may become a *bystander*). The most common form of contact is a telepathic message heard in a character's mind. The message can be prophetic, "DEATH RIDES A PALE HORSE"; cautionary, "BEWARE THE DARK PLACES"; instructional, "RAISE THE HAND OF JUSTICE"; informative, "IT DOES NOT LIVE"; motivational, "PARDON IT OF ITS SINS"; or reassuring, "IT CANNOT BEAR ITS OWN EXISTENCE." This phrase can seem audible, even though there might be no one around to have uttered it. It might be heard over a radio or television, interrupting regular programming, and with no indication that the statement was actually part of the current show. Or the message can be heard strictly within the character's mind. Perhaps it's in his own voice, like an odd wayward thought. Maybe the statement is delivered with a distinctly foreign voice, potentially the "voice of God."

The kind of message you use is based on the character in question, and the situation. Characters may need a narrative hammer blow to justify attacking or confronting a terrifying monster. The voice of seemingly divine authority instructing a character on what to do may be required for him to take action. Other characters may simply need a gentle nudge — "IT IS IN PAIN" — assurance that dealing with the creature is the right thing to do. The situation of the imbuing might also encourage characters to respond to a monster, and they simply need affirmation to do so. Take the sample character Brenda in Chapter 4. She doesn't need to be told to confront the monster endangering her daughter, but the Messengers' instruction motivates Brenda to take decisive action. Characters without existing reason to involve themselves with a creature might need a stronger push from the Heralds. A disaffected youth who would normally avoid danger might recognize a kindred spirit in a creature when the message "YOU ARE BOTH OUTSIDERS" is delivered.

If players have created their characters whole — including creeds, Virtues and edges — before the game begins, use Herald messages as reinforcement for characters' primary Virtues and creeds. Hunters' primary Virtues are their long-term goals in the hunt, whether to destroy the enemy and claim a world for humanity, to pardon those who still retain souls, or to understand monsters in order to free people of hidden influence. Hunters' creeds are the approaches that they take to fulfilling the goals of their primary Virtues. A Judge seeks to put down evil by always striving toward the greatest good. A Martyr offers himself to save others — even the enemy — if it makes for a better world.

Players should know these goals and their characters' approaches to them from creating well-developed hunters. However, messages from the Heralds can reinforce these points to make sure characters stay on track, not only in the imbuing but for the chronicle that follows. The proclamation "AVENGE THE VICTIMS OF EVIL" is pretty clear about the Messengers' intent for an Avenger. A despairing sense of personal loss and anguish helps a Redeemer understand that the *thing* before her may not have chosen its fate. Such reminders can be as gentle or blatant as you like (and as you think players and characters need).

If players have created characters who are strictly human — the imbuing will decide their primary Virtues and creeds — base any messages on the characters' human identities. A woman who's devoted her life to helping others is a likely candidate for the Mercy Virtue, and you can create a statement that befits her likely response to a monster, say, "RELIEVE ITS SUFFERING." A proud youth who chafes at authority might lean toward Zeal, even before being chosen, and you can create a message that suits his identity: "IT DENIES YOU FREEDOM."

Try not to pigeonhole characters into Virtues or creeds with the messages you use. Creeds are typically assigned to characters based on their reactions to the supernatural at the moment of the imbuing. An attacker is likely to become an Avenger, Defender or Judge, for example. Don't make players feel like their characters have to act a certain way because of the content of your messages. The potential Merciful, above, for example, might have had a traumatic week. Anger and rage has built up inside her and reaches the boiling point. When confronted by the walking dead, she lashes out, perhaps for the first time in her life. Suddenly, she may no longer be a contender for Mercy. Use the Heralds' words to guide players and characters to respond as you think they'll need it most, but ultimately let players decide how their characters react to the imbuing.

Audible or mental messages aren't the only means by which the Heralds make their desires or warnings known. There are all kinds of ways to make their statements and inspire characters to action. Playing on any of the senses is

valid. Characters might be overcome with a nauseating smell of rot just moments before a zombie's presence is revealed. A piercing, shrill sound might cut through characters and make them hostile at the moment a bloodsucker appears. A sudden gut-wrenching sensation might wash over characters in the presence of a ghost to signify the creature's inherent *wrongness*. Characters may simply feel that the world is closing in. Time might slow to a snail's pace and events appear to occur in slow motion. Light might diminish to a dull, red glow, inspiring ominous dread. The letters of a newspaper, advertisement, billboard or street sign could rearrange momentarily, offering inspiration or direction. A line such as "Attendance at the game was..." could become "NOT ALL SINS ARE WANTON." "Silly rabbit, tricks are for kids" could change to "IT IS A DEVOURER OF CHILDREN." Perhaps characters have precognitive visions of imminent events, or they enter dream-states in which sickening transgressions occur, and then the characters snap back to their current time and place. You can use almost any sense or sensation to convey the Heralds' message to potential hunters. As with "verbal" messages, just decide in advance how aggressive and instructional such contact needs to be to make characters react to the creatures they witness.

The specific content of Heralds' messages is completely your decision. You can have characters hear any phrase or experience any kind of feeling. The key is to relay as much or as little as you believe players and characters need to understand that something extraordinary is happening. The Messengers typically keep their contact to only a few words, which are usually somewhat cryptic. While they may leave chosen baffled or bewildered by contact, the Heralds use exposure to abominations as the punctuation to their messages. A strange, echoing statement such as, "EVIL WALKS AMONG YOU," may startle and confuse characters. However, the same message followed immediately by the intrusion of a raging cadaver makes an unquestionable point.

Contact with the Messengers can have various effects on characters, whether at the imbuing or later in their hunter existence. Otherwordly forces intruding on a person's life, mind and psyche is rarely a gentle experience. Contact can cause memory gaps, nausea, fugues, exhaustion and even temporary blindness or deafness. It can also invigorate characters with a singular sense of purpose, righteousness and confidence. Whereas grappling with a creature of the night might be unthinkable to a character before the imbuing, doing so afterward might seem the first truly *right* thing the character has ever done. He senses unquestionable justification, even as he risks his life and inflicts harm to another creature. A character who offers a hand of aid to a loathsome beast finds unsurpassing joy in the act, as if doing so is the greatest virtue she could ever exhibit.

Many hunters express a profound sense of reward and accomplishment in their pursuit of the cause. Staging the hunt gets compared to the greatest accomplishments and joys in hunters' lives: getting a driver's license, graduating from high school or college, getting married, having a child, attaining a lifelong goal. For many hunters, experiencing this satisfaction makes the hunt worthwhile, despite all the pain, isolation and death that comes with it. Some hunters even consider this "high" a goal in itself. Express this reward to players or reluctant characters. If a woman is unlikely to confront a monstrosity at her imbuing, explain how refusing to act feels like a crime, perhaps even the greatest failing of the character's life. Meanwhile, doing *something* seems like the greatest possible feat she could accomplish. This kind of epiphany may be all a player needs to feel he roleplays realistically, when his character defies everything she ever held dear and goes face to face with a walking horror.

On the other hand, disturbing sensations that coincide with Messenger contact can be used to suggest a character has strayed from his intended purpose. Perhaps an Avenger has begun to lose vigor for the hunt and has spared the enemy out of depression, uncertainty or apathy. Subsequent contact with the Messengers suggests punishment or reprimand through disorientation, stunned senses or physical illness. Such narrative tools are useful when you perceive characters to be straying from the tenets of their creeds and primary Virtues, the values that they once upheld and for which they were chosen.

The volume of Messenger communication at characters' imbuing is at your discretion. Each character could receive a warning or vision, all the characters could have one as a whole, or small groups of characters could experience their own contact. The choice is yours based on the similarities of characters' motivations, and the events that take place. If two human characters are in a fight of their own in the prelude, one message could be used to turn their combined attention to the real enemy. A single message to all characters, perhaps over a rail-station loudspeaker, might be sufficient to inspire the whole group and change their lives thereafter.

Individual forms of contact for each character probably provide the most dramatic and rewarding approach. Players feel their characters are unique when communicated with specifically by the unfathomable Heralds. Individual contact also allows you to tailor a message to each character in turn, pulling his strings and helping to define his identity. Individual communication also gives each character (and player) a sense of personal involvement in the hunt; she is not just a number amid the legion.

The frequency of Messenger contact during the prelude is also at your discretion. Many hunters claim to have more contact with the Heralds during their imbuing than at any time thereafter. You can use this intensity of communication to make any points to characters and players that you feel are necessary to forward your narrative. Some characters may leap into the hunt headfirst. Others may

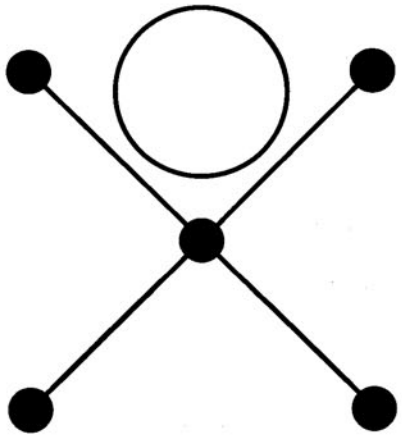
need coaxing, and if other means of doing so are ineffective, direct Messenger intervention can be the hammer you need.

Imagine a character attacked by the "living" body of his dead brother. Roleplayed realistically, the character probably cannot bring himself to fight back against his brother, despite the circumstances. However, if the character *needs* to be able to defend himself, and the player *needs* justification for striking back, you can step in with the Messengers. A simple statement such as, "IT IS ONLY HIS SHELL," may be enough to make fighting back a plausible option.

Using the Heralds as a narrative hammer is rather heavy-handed in storytelling. Search for ways to motivate characters toward plot destinations through characterization, fear, previously unknown confidence or the need to understand before you resort to the *deus ex machina*. Players hate to have their characters led around by the nose. However, if you use repeated Messenger intervention in terms that motivate characters according to their own identities, as in the example above, then you strike a balance between narrative guidance and character development.

Initial Edges

If all hunter Traits are chosen at character creation, players know what their edges are before the game begins. If players create strictly human characters, they don't know what edges to expect. Realistically, in the context of the imbuing, the chosen don't make any conscious decisions about what kinds of powers they use against a monster. Such people have only just awoken to the truth of reality; they certainly are not fully aware of the powers at their disposal.



Staying Character Motivations

An effective tool to reinforce players' chosen creeds, or to help decide creeds when players *have not* chosen them, is to ask players to voice character motivations at the imbuing. Rather than allow each player to quietly know what inspires his character, make him explain what compels every action. Thus, if a potential Visionary confronts a zombie to understand it — "What are you? Where did you come from?" — require that the player explain the characters' reasons aloud, for all to hear. Perhaps the character was once in the military and was always told what to do without knowing the reasons. When orders insisted that he kill without apparent justification, he vowed never again to lash out without proof of wrongdoing.

Voicing motivations at the imbuing helps players develop their characters. The "Virtue" and "creed" entries on their character sheets suddenly mean much more when explained in terms of character origins.

The exercise also helps choose creeds for characters who have thus far been only human. Why does a character usher vulnerable people out an exit, away from a monster? Why does a character stand face to face with a beast and insist that it explain itself? Why does a character search for guilt or fear beneath a nightstalker's fierce demeanor? Players' answers to these questions help you choose potential creeds and empower characters at the imbuing. Even if a character flees the scene rather than confront a monster, creed can still be chosen if the character's motivations are rationalized and explained. Running away to get the police or a weapon that's elsewhere is still doing *something*. Running away because the character feels he must live for other reasons — to provide for a family, for example — doesn't necessarily deny him a creed.

The rule of thumb is: Characters' reasons for actions should usually derive directly from who they have been all their mundane lives. Don't let players act out of character simply to get the creeds that they want. A person who's been defined as meek shouldn't suddenly become a holy terror. A person who's always strived toward objectivity shouldn't suddenly become opinionated. Make sure characters' human identities, actions at the imbuing and assigned creeds all coincide.

The exception may be for characters who undergo a radical life-change because of the imbuing. The meek person, above, may find that the imbuing suddenly invigorates him with the energy and confidence that he's always lacked. He will no longer allow himself to be mild-mannered. He will assert his will and personality, and now he has the power to do it. Such radical shifts of identity are fine as long as they're explained aloud for the group and Storyteller, and creed should be chosen or assigned appropriately.

Once characters' creeds are established, you're advised to choose an initial edge for each character for the imbuing. If characters have been pregenerated, just pick one of the edges from each sheet. That's the power the character manifests at the imbuing. For strictly human characters, it's safest to assign the level-one edge of a character's *apparent* creed path. If a character assaults a creature directly, he might be an Avenger and you can assign him the one-dot Vengeance power Cleave for the scene. If a character approaches the monster without fear and unabashedly asks if it knows it is terrifying, that character might be an Innocent and can be assigned the level-one Innocence edge.

The secret to assigning edges for use in the prelude is to make sure that every character has something unique to bring to bear against the supernatural. Each hunter should be able to perform an incredible feat that clearly indicates he has changed or been empowered. A would-be Judge can recognize amazing details about the monster before him, and the scene in general. A Redeemer can bring a creature to a halt with a command! An Avenger's wrath is vented through crushing blows he never thought himself capable of delivering.

If two characters appear to be of the same creed, assign them different level-one edges if you want their first acts as hunters to be inspirational. If two characters are Judges, let only one have the first Judgment power. The other character's edge can be chosen from those listed on his sheet. Or, in the case of "human" characters, he can be assigned another level-one power, probably from another path of the same primary Virtue. In the case of two Judges, choose an edge for the second from either of the Avenger or Defenders paths. If other characters in the group already possess those powers, choose one from a path belonging to another Virtue. The second Judge might have a level-one power from Redeemer, Martyr or Innocent, or from Visionary.

If a starting edge assigned to a character does not belong to his primary path, make sure it still suits his identity. If the Judge, above, is cool and calculating, his starting edge probably comes from the Defender, Redeemer or Visionary paths, rather than from those of Avenger, Martyr or Innocent.

Assigning an initial edge from outside a character's primary path also imposes some requirements on further Virtue and edge choices. A Judge with the level-one Visionary power now needs to possess a point of the Vision Virtue. The player's choices for assigning his three Virtue points are therefore limited. So if a starting edge is assigned to a human character for the prelude, make sure it appeals to the player. Otherwise, you force his character in directions he may not want to go.

Assigning edges from other paths of the same primary Virtue even poses this problem. Giving a Judge character the level-one Defense edge now limits what other powers the player can choose. He *has* to have the one-dot Judgment edge, so has only one point left with which to purchase another power, if any.

Perhaps the best thing to do when determining characters' creeds and any starting edges during play is to take each player aside. Explain what creed you believe the character is, and explain what edge you want to assign him at the imbuing. If the player agrees and believes the choice is in keeping with his character, you may proceed. If the player doesn't want to go in that direction, you can discuss other creeds or edges.

Manifesting Edges

The way in which a character's initial edge manifests in the prelude depends on your narrative needs. Do the characters need a hard push to act against the monster, or do they need only gentle guidance?

Characters who need inspiration to act against the unknown may manifest their abilities in overt ways that clearly empower them. An Avenger may suddenly hold a fiery brand that doesn't hurt his hand. Clearly, it's a weapon that he can bring to bear. An Innocent may stand immediately before a creature, but the thing looks past him as if he weren't there — or he were invisible! Although these apparent abilities would normally be shocking (and might frighten a character more than does the beast before him), edges manifest with an inherent rightness, as if characters are meant to have them and can do no wrong. The characters have never exhibited these capabilities before, but they intuitively understand what to do with them. How a character interprets that sensation is based on his own beliefs or origins. "God intervenes," "My potent will makes me capable of extraordinary feats," or "Exposure to this creature conjures up powers that all people have, they simply don't know it." The form of the character's reassurance ultimately doesn't matter. He simply possesses an amazing capability and becomes aware of it in the presence of the supernatural.

Characters who would truly be frightened by their own powers, or those who don't need overt displays to act, can manifest their edges subtly. Powers aren't showy or provocative. They're understated, perhaps even imperceptible, yet they have full effect. Cleave, for example, might be activated and used in the act of swinging a board. The attack is extremely potent, probably surprisingly so to the character, but not "magical." Likewise, Bluster could be used to stop a monster in its tracks. The Redeemer may be surprised by the results, but no overt display occurs. Hunters who wield subtle edges are aware that they can do some strange things, but they do not wield "superpowers." Their true understanding of these capabilities comes with time and pursuit of the hunt.

Another narrative tool you can use in the prelude to introduce edges is the *denouement*. In the course of the prelude, the characters are confronted by a monstrous creature. They act, exhibiting their edges and dealing with the thing. No questions are asked. Using edges simply comes naturally, as if they're tools the characters have worked with all their lives. Only after the finalé do characters realize the enormity of what has happened — that they have manifested incredible abilities. "How was that possible? Where did those powers come from? What have I become?" All these questions are answered in the days and weeks that follow the imbuing, as characters come to terms with the new world into which they're thrust.

Players don't announce that powers are activated during the prelude. Rather, the Messengers turn edges on for characters. Players can make rolls to use their edges — and can even invest Conviction points into rolls to capture the drama in game terms — but responsibility for calling up bizarre powers lies more with the story you tell than it does with initiative rolls and combat turns.

Bystanders

Confronted with the spectacle of people running around, attacking something and creating a disturbance — not to mention the presence of a supernatural being — most normal humans flee the scene of an imbuing. Those who can't or do not escape fall unconscious, gibber and drool, or simply fail to recognize that anything is going on. And even if they do witness anything, they fail to remember it afterward.

Obviously, hunters are not these people. They are chosen and even directed to be in the right place at the right time, and made to see the supernatural for what it is. Ones who do something about it are imbued.

There is another breed of person created or changed by hunters' imbuing, however. These people are potential hunter candidates. They're also coincidentally at the right (or wrong) place at the right time, courtesy of the Messengers. Yet thanks to some failing in their spirit, courage, identity or will, they do not respond to the unknown. Rather than answer the question of the monster's existence, these people simply watch and witness everything that occurs. They see the creature. They see the hunters and all their edges at work. They remember everything they see and hear. They just don't *do* anything.

The result is what is known in burgeoning hunter circles as a bystander: A person with no edges, but who is exposed to the truth of the World of Darkness at other people's imbuing. A bystander doesn't have any second sight or protection against monsters' mind- and body-control powers (gained through Conviction). However, he has the full, torturous, gruesome knowledge that monsters exist. And the most frightening part of all: After a bystander's failed imbuing, he can't see or sense monsters again unless he actively goes in search of them. They could be anywhere, posing as anyone — and unless a creature willingly or unwittingly reveals itself, a bystander never knows what those creatures are or what he's up against.

Bystanders are rare, even more so than hunters themselves; most potential chosen have the presence to earn their powers. Bystanders aren't born at every imbuing, but they exist. A character may have the Bystander Background

Trait, which indicates how many "failed hunters" he knows. These people may be created at his imbuing, or he may come in contact with them in the course of the hunt.

For the most part, bystanders are hunters' allies. They, of all people, can sympathize with hunters, because both groups share the same awareness. If they feel the need to get involved in the hunt after the fact, bystanders can provide aid, resources, weapons and information to hunters. However, few are willing to risk their lives unless remorse or depression inspired by their awakening drives them to do so.

Even if no character in your group has the Bystander Trait, you can involve some of these people in the characters' imbuing to introduce sympathetic (or antagonistic) characters of your own. Bystanders are intended as Storyteller rather than players' characters.

The Monster's Fate

The Messengers create a meeting of imbued people and a monster, the result of which is a confrontation of some kind. That can be a fight, an interrogation or an effort at reconciling the creature back into the human fold. The events of the meeting depend on the callings of the characters and the danger posed by the creature. Monsters typically revealed are low-powered, inexperienced with their new states, wounded and vulnerable, or simply nonsentient — all the easier for hunters to contend with them.

So what becomes of the monster encountered in a prelude really depends on how the characters receive it, and whether it provokes or can negotiate with them. The point is, don't assume an imbuing automatically results in a fight. Caregivers and the inquisitive might have other more pressing issues than inflicting harm, and your creature should have the capacity to receive these overtures to create roleplaying opportunities. Sure, a staggering corpse is dead, and perhaps on a vile mission of its own, but it remembers life and doesn't necessarily want to kill *everyone*. A vampire may have been changed recently and still wrestles with its morality — while starving for human blood. A ghost may simply wish to be laid to rest, but vents its frustrations as a poltergeist. Characters may even help a creature at their imbuing, perhaps gaining an ally against the many other, less congenial creatures that they will encounter.

Be prepared for a variety of contingencies at the characters' imbuing. Create a short story through which the hunters may go if they choose to work with, rather than against, the monster. And if the characters do fight the monster, is the battle told narratively by you with player contributions, or is a traditional combat scene rolled for using the rules? Does the monster fight to the "death" or will it be driven off before then? Is the creature a thinking being with its own agenda, or a mindless entity (and in either case, is killing meddling humans a priority)? Would the monster prefer to disappear rather than fight?

Changing Creeds and Edges

A player may discover after roleplaying her character in the prelude that the creed or edges chosen during character creation don't fit the direction in which her character now heads. You must decide if characters can change creeds and edges after the imbuing. If you think about it, the chosen don't *ask* to be imbued. They make no requests to see the true World of Darkness. Yet they're exposed to it anyway, and powers are thrust upon them by unknown forces. Perhaps players cannot change creeds or edges once they've been chosen; that's what the Messengers have bestowed.

Alternatively, you can let creeds and edges be changed as long as the chronicle proper has not gotten under way — only the prelude has been told. Perhaps a newly created hunter is highly malleable in the hands of the Messengers and can be reshaped as they decide they need. Maybe a character's own identity or will can combine with the Heralds' influence to evolve the kind of hunter that a character finally becomes. Although a character may have exhibited Cleave in the prelude, that power escapes him now, even as others manifest. Any or all of these narrative explanations for changing creeds and edges can be used in your stories. Just complete any such changes by the beginning of the first true game session. Hunters' identities are set in stone once they finally make the conscious effort to *pursue* monsters.

Fine-tuning creeds, Virtues and edges is actually somewhat common when players come to the prelude with only human characters. The players know their characters' mundane identities. When a monster is revealed, they respond in keeping with those identities (or according to any personality changes that derive from the imbuing). You might decide creeds and initial edges for the characters, and make them stick; the Heralds have spoken. Or you could let players adjust your decisions after the prelude. Perhaps a player feels her "Defender" is more of a Martyr. Maybe an Innocent was being roleplayed as a Visionary. That Discern edge might be more appropriate as Witness.

You should review any such changes. They should still be in keeping with characters' human identities. Radical changes in personality — and creed — should be justified in terms of the story. If you're not convinced, don't agree to a change. Don't let players alter their characters simply to gain more power.

And if the creature is destroyed, what remains of it? Dust? A corpse? The answer depends on how difficult you want the characters' lives to be at this early stage of their rebirth. How can they explain standing over a dismembered corpse, their own hands bloodied — yet the body has been dead for weeks?

Closure

By the end of the prelude, the players have walked a mile in their characters' shoes, roleplaying events in the lives of ordinary people. Then, without warning, the characters are faced with a horrific revelation: Monsters are real. The imbued respond to the sight and contend with the creature. They exhibit amazing capabilities. Their eyes are opened to witness a world they never dared imagine. The characters' lives will never be the same again; they will be waking nightmares.

The majority of your prelude is complete, but how do you end it? The characters have fought a terrifying being. Do they nonchalantly introduce themselves, "Hi, I'm Dave. From your powers, you must be the group Avenger!"? For the love of God, no!

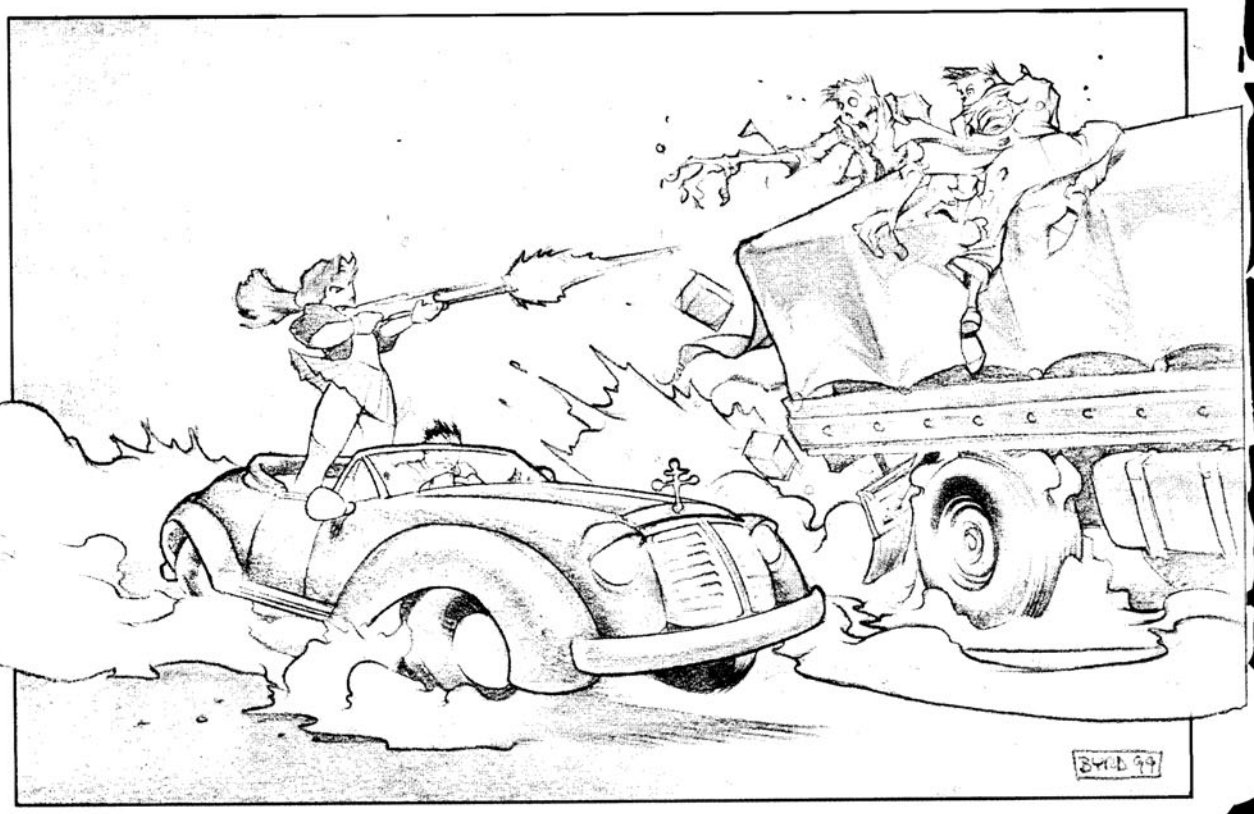
Now more than ever, the players have to climb into their characters minds to decide how they react to everything that's happened. The dust has settled. A silent calm falls. The characters have just seen and done things that should not be possible. A dead creature may lie in their midst — undeniable proof that what seemed to happen *did* happen. Now is the time that the characters and players must take everything in and try to make sense of it all — or not at all.

To put yourself in anything remotely like a similar context, think back to a fight you may have gotten into as a kid at school. Or remember a fight you witnessed. The scene all boiled down to rage. Hit. Kick. Bite. Punch. Throwing everything into winning, into causing more harm than was received. To be the winner. All the kids watched, chanted and jeered, "Get him," but really they just wanted to see violence. It didn't matter who won.

When the playground fight was over, an uncomfortable silence fell across the combatants and crowd. There was shame for hurting, shame for losing and shame for watching at all. Everyone went their separate ways as they tried to avoid attention and the disturbing emptiness that followed.

Although hunters' experiences are more adult and far more mortifying, the sensations are probably the same. Realistically, most people who find themselves in the aftermath of a hunters' imbuing would leave the scene. Escape. Try to deny that it happened. Refuse to believe what they did and saw. They'd try to resume a normal life, but they can't.

The finalé of your prelude can take any form you and the players like, but never forget that the characters are still human. They do not adapt immediately to bizarre powers, monstrous sights or mysterious voices. If any kind of resolu-



tion is suggested for **Hunter** preludes, it's that there is none. The imbuing is the start of characters' new lives. The story is just beginning. Characters might flee the scene of the event and try to shut it out, but memories of it and visions that follow insist that the world is no longer the same. The characters must adapt or lose their minds completely.

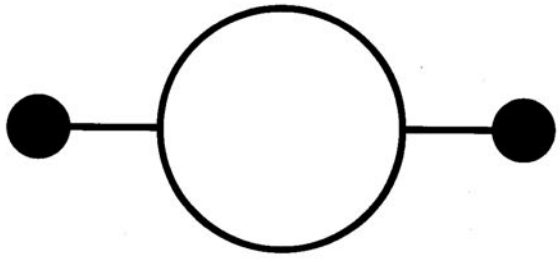
The prelude therefore ends without a satisfying resolution, because there can't be one. The characters pray that word of what they did never gets back to them, and that nothing more ever comes of it. Hopefully this anticlimactic approach to events is sufficiently unsettling that players empathize with their characters and wonder, as their characters do, what might happen next in the lives of the imbued.

The Symbolic Imbuing

Depending on how direct a role you want the Messengers to play in your **Hunter** chronicle, and on how poignantly you wish to depict the characters' imbuing, you can use symbolism to convey the significance of the event. To create a pseudo-supernatural **Hunter** game, describe followers of the three primary Virtues in different ways during the prelude: Zealots as wrapped in flames, the Merciful as bathed in light and Visionaries as whipped by winds. These three portrayals unmistakably emphasize the enormity of the imbuing — that some otherworldly force takes a hand in the characters' lives, charging them with divine or ethereal power. The three imbuing images also cast characters into their respective primary Virtues, and create distinct divisions among them to reinforce the various hunters' uniqueness.

This symbolic approach to the imbuing helps players and characters understand that something amazing and disturbing occurs to them. Yet, when no one is hurt by the fire, light or wind, and an unmistakable monster makes its entrance, the characters' symbolism helps contrast them from the creature and emphasizes their need to address the abomination.

The symbolic imbuing is ideal for starting roleplayers, or for those who chafe at ambiguity in character roles. The righteousness of the characters' mission seems clear. Now, all characters need do is decide how their individual missions should be accomplished, which is the narrative equivalent of deciding creed.



The Newly Imbued

The period following hunters' imbuing is perhaps the most difficult in all their new lives. Certainly, the months and perhaps years to follow will be filled with hardships, as days and nights are dedicated to stalking supernatural beasts, friends are lost in the struggle, family drifts away and hunters potentially lose life and limb. However, the challenges faced by a seasoned hunter don't compare to those dealt with by the newly imbued. The experienced hunter has been through his difficult formative stage. He believes he knows his purpose, he's aware of his weaknesses, he has tricks to use against the enemy, and he has back-up to call upon. The foundling hunter has none of these advantages.

The days, weeks and even months after a person's imbuing are what make or break him as a hunter. It's in this period that the chosen must come to grips with the twisted, corrupt world into which he has suddenly been reborn. Monsters are facts, not fantasy. They lurk in all the dark, hidden places where humans cannot or will not look. The creatures are in charge of society, politics, religion and culture. They pull the strings of pawns to ensure that their tainted vision of things comes to pass.

As much as the chosen tries to close his eyes and mind to what he's seen and knows, as much as he clings desperately to his hollow former life, he cannot deny the truth. Everywhere he looks — on the streets, in businesses, in church, in positions of power — are monsters hiding in shadows or disguised as ordinary people. They lurk, sneak and slither, playing their games with unwitting lives, and sating their hideous appetites on human fears and flesh.

Worst of all, the ignorant masses have no clue of the truth. Indeed, they're incapable of knowing, as subversive powers and crushing lies break the common person's ability to truly comprehend. Not even public displays of impossible powers or terrible beasts enlighten the herds. They simply turn away, or the hunter's effort at exposure is covered up, and his existence is made known to the *real* powers that be.

There's no one for the recently imbued to turn to, either. Family and friends try to tolerate his bizarre stories and behavior, but they eventually grow concerned for his sanity. Coworkers look at him askance as he behaves maniacally and eventually stops showing up altogether.

If the hunter can bear the weight of his knowledge and the apparent futility of his existence, he may eventually realize that the only people he may turn to are others with the same burden. Surely, he cannot be the only one. His first option might be to look for the people who were there that fateful night, the ones who stayed and fought or negotiated or schemed. Perhaps the outsider goes in search of others of his kind by scouring the streets, leaving signs of his passing, searching newspapers for odd events, or surfing the Internet in hopes of finding information about his "condition."

For most hunters, awareness of the awful truth can be ignored or resisted only so long before they must do something about it. Just as they could not turn away on the night of their imbuing, they must eventually turn their gaze upon what prowls the shadows. Sooner or later, whether in the company of fellow chosen or completely alone, a hunter sets out to oppose the creatures he witnesses. His intent may be to restore them to humanity to save himself, understand them so that he may understand himself, or wipe the monsters from the face of the Earth out of revenge for what's been done to him.

If a hunter is lucky, he may survive his first *intended* encounter with the supernatural. The lessons he learns teach him to be smart, cautious and resourceful. The result is a seasoned hunter who seeks salvation and protection for mankind and the world.

Storytelling Novice Hunters

The preceding string of events is typical of hunters' experiences and development as they strive to make sense of their calling. Many die trying and never learn what it was all about or what they were supposed to accomplish. If your troupe's characters survive, it's your job to depict the hardships, loneliness, confusion and obsession they undergo, and perhaps even the triumphs they celebrate. It's not an easy job. You portray human development that must occur over a considerable period of time; imbued aren't superhunters by their first true "adventure." It takes time, focus, luck and skill for hunters to become good at their game, but even then, the hardships of the calling don't necessarily fade. Friends still die, lost loves remain lost, and monsters are always out their in seemingly endless numbers.

The Day After

The period immediately following the imbuing is easily the most difficult, for the imbued have innumerable questions and no answers. Yet the source of their fears — monsters — appear everywhere. You can describe the "downtime" between characters' imbuing and their first traditional story in a couple of ways. You may sit with each player in turn to explain the suffering her character endures as she tries to rationalize and reconcile the events of *that night*. Treat this session like an extended prelude, explaining how the character sees monsters repeatedly, despite her best efforts to ignore or avoid them. Allow the player courses of action — what to do upon seeing another creature, whether to confess actions to family or the authorities, how to hold onto past life — but remind her that her character is still ostensibly a normal person; it may be too soon for butchery just yet.

The character becomes increasingly paranoid, afraid that the creatures can see her, too. She worries that the events of her change will come back to haunt her, that the police (or *worse*) will follow the trail back to her — and finish what she started.

Family and friends become worried, distant and perhaps even fade from the picture, whether the character realizes it or not. The mundane concerns of her former life — work, bills, appointments, and perhaps even house, car or classes — become meaningless in the bald face of the truth. Life as it used to be probably falls apart unless the character is a veritable rock and balances her past and present lifestyles (and the player convinces you that this can be done at all). Ultimately, let the player decide how bad things get for her character, based on the hunter's identity. It's up to you to make sure developments are realistic. Knowing that things rule the world, and maintaining old relationships and responsibilities may simply be incompatible.

Another approach to relating the decline of the newly imbued is in your chronicle's initial stories. Perhaps the first episodes aren't as much about fighting the supernatural as they are about coming to terms with its existence. Monsters may never even appear in these sessions, at least not in a confrontational manner. Players simply roleplay their characters' decline and, perhaps, desperate union. Events at work seem meaningless. The boss gets irritable. The spouse or significant other wonders what's wrong, and then turns angry when the character can't pull out of her depression. Money gets tight. Food runs short. But all the while, there are monsters in the hidden places, watching, waiting. And then there are the voices, the half-glimpsed warnings and the terrible dreams that remind the character that obscenities rule the night.

I've Heard the Message

Contact from the Messengers declines sharply after a character's imbuing. The Heralds arrange all the elements that create their warrior, and then throw him to the wolves to see if he's worthy. That doesn't mean the Messengers are absolutely silent in hunters' early days, though. Rather, the Messengers act to deny newly imbued the chance to hide from the truth. Whereas one of the chosen tries to ignore what he did last week, the Heralds remind him in the form of more sensations, messages or images. The intent is to drag him out of his shell and make him struggle to survive.

A common Herald strategy is to make a hunter aware of a monster or suspicious circumstance so that the chosen feels compelled to investigate. A character reading a newspaper account of his own imbuing might witness, "So far, the police admit to having no leads in the bizarre events of Sep. 14th. Inspector Weitz THE PAWN OF DARKNESS SEARCHES FOR YOU is reported to have undisclosed theories about the perpetrators...." Of course, the otherworldly message disappears in the next moment, but the sign is enough to shake a character out of denial, especially with hint that he is not safe from incrimination or discovery.

Use such Messenger communication to inspire characters to act, even in their early days of the imbuing. If the authorities are in league with monsters, and those agents are

in search of the characters, perhaps the imbued need to do something about it — whether go into hiding, seek aid from others present that night, or dig up something that can be used against the enemy. Here lies the stuff of your first true Hunter stories.

Friends in Need

Ultimately, the newly imbued's only comfort in his harrowing existence is other hunters, those who know what's going on, can support what he has seen, and can confirm that the initiate isn't insane. Most hunters are imbued in groups, the automatic makings for "platoons" of soldiers. Starting hunters probably turn to these people first in their organization for the war. Perhaps the easiest way to find fellow imbued is to return to the "scene of the crime." It may take days or nights, but hunters who want to find their fellows in misery are most likely to find them here, as others in the group have the same idea.

There are other means to locating hunters, though, and not necessarily ones imbued alongside a character. The hunter code of symbols is a language that comes intuitively to the chosen. Characters may not fully understand what they doodle, sketch or scribble at first, but the symbols take on meaning and significance in time, especially when novice hunters discover the same symbols spray-painted on urban walls, worked into logos and letterheads, or posted on websites. Hunters use these symbols to indicate their presence in a vicinity, sort of a "help wanted" sign for the imbued. Once a marker or call for help is recognized, it's only a matter of time before hunters warily encounter each other and perhaps even form an alliance.

Some suicidal or foolhardy imbued have been known to start the hunt right away, intent on understanding what they've become through trial by fire, or desperate to put an end to their suffering. The lucky aren't found by the enemy, but rather by other hunters performing their own patrols, perhaps even by those chosen who were present at the character's own imbuing.

The Messengers have also been known to reunite hunters created at the same scene. Separate visions, statements or compulsions delivered to each of the characters gives them reason to converge on the same place or to look into the same series of events. Suppose a child is murdered. All the characters had a connection to her — one as a teacher, one as a neighbor and one as a family member. The characters suspect foul play of the worst kind and start digging. Their efforts lead them to the same conclusions and to each other. When the same people converge as they did that first horrendous time, it seems clear that fate has something in store for them collectively.

And, of course, there's the Internet. The web eventually becomes the primary means of hunter communication as they use it to learn about the enemy and themselves. The hunter-net website is the foremost of hunter contact points, but is also just starting. Its designer, Witness1, founded the site only recently and is well aware that it has been compro-

mised by the very creatures that hunters stalk. Yet the site, and others like it, persists, despite even hacking and subversive intrusion. It's almost as if hunter sites have a life of their own on the net, where so much human consciousness, creativity and communication exists for all to share.

Newly imbued who log onto a hunter website find the salvation that they so desperately crave — proof that their experiences have been real (a revelation that certainly has a double edge). Although it's dangerous due to the possibility of setups or traps, hunters online can confer and join forces in their crusade, whether in the flesh or strictly through the electronic medium.

Regardless of how starting hunters find allies, if at all, once they find strength in numbers or strength in themselves, your chronicle can officially get under way.

Manifesting Other Edges

Hunters typically exhibit one or, at most, two edges in the prelude. They may have other powers, though, whether chosen by players at character creation or after the prelude is complete. Hunters usually learn that they're capable of more feats in the days after the imbuing (a fact that only compounds their fear and confusion). You can incorporate discovery of these powers into your narrative of downtime events after the prelude, or you can work it into any preliminary short stories you tell.

Hunters can realize or discover that they're capable of still more feats through a variety of means. They may simply sense after the imbuing that further capabilities lie beneath the surface, just waiting to be called upon. Intense concentration, nightmares or preliminary hunting efforts may draw these edges forth. Powers can also manifest through accidents. Shock, sudden pain or emotional outbursts could trigger heretofore unknown capacities. Subsequent supernatural spectacles could inspire unexpected edge effects. Suddenly seeing a creature in the workplace might activate a power despite a character's ignorance of the ability. Whether he turns that power against the creature is up to him, but doing so publicly may have its own repercussions.

Even if a starting character has no more edges at his disposal to discover, his known ones may still manifest under any of the above circumstances. Control and perhaps even mastery over edges comes from experimenting with them to learn their parameters and limitations. A hunter who doesn't learn to control his edges, like any weapon, is as much a danger to himself and defenseless people as he is to the enemy.

Of course, you may choose to take newly imbued characters from the frying pan and throw them into the fire. Unexpected edges may not develop — and old ones may not reappear — until characters take an active role against the supernatural. That is, you may keep players and characters in the dark about their capabilities, shedding light only when the hunters' lives are at stake; their powers manifest for survival purposes only. This approach teaches harsh lessons, but it also creates an intense mood of the unknown. Not only are hunters ignorant of the creatures in the world, but they remain largely ignorant of themselves. Imagine trying to make sense of a new reality when you can't even make sense of who or what you are.

Keeping the Chronicle Running

The players' characters have been through the prelude and their imbuing. Faced with the chilling truths of the world and its secret inhabitants, and faced with the painful fact that humanity at large cannot comprehend the danger it's in, the imbued have sought each other out. Their initial contact might simply have been to reassure each other and confirm their own stability. However, in time, after ongoing visions and encounters with walking malignity, characters eventually decide that they have to stop the evil occurring all around them. They have to put aside their own fear and perhaps even mortality to rectify the supernatural crimes committed against mankind. That's when the characters genuinely start their hunt. That's when your **Hunter** stories and chronicle truly get going.

The remainder of this chapter addresses ideas, themes and concepts of creating and telling stories. If you're a tried and true Storyteller, you already have your own approach and style. There are concerns yet to be addressed that are truly unique to managing an ongoing **Hunter** chronicle, however, conditions that you may not have thought of but might encounter in your own games.

Keeping the Characters Together

When the Messengers imbue people, they don't scrutinize human interests, ethics or compatibility, they empower individuals who have the raw materials necessary to act against the unknown. The Heralds want weapons against humanity's monstrous tormentors. Whether those "weapons" get along is irrelevant; the mission is all that matters.

Although the Messengers' unearthly perspective is cold and distant, the foundations of their presumptions are solid. Hunters need each other. The imbued are individuals, each of whom possesses certain powers to use against the night. Some chosen are able to recognize evil and discern it from good (or from the partially good, if such is possible among monsters). Others bring violent retribution against abominations. Still others raise up the deserving from the enemy horde to save them and perhaps even turn the former against the latter. Finally, certain hunters have the presence and insight to look beyond the night-to-night fray to understand who's winning the war, why it must be fought and in which direction it should be taken. Unfortunately, no single hunter possesses *all* of these abilities. No single hunter can wage the war himself and expect to contend with only the corrupt. No solo hunter can hope to separate all the penitent from the damned. No solitary

hunter can hope to stem the tide by himself. Without this versatility, no single hunter can hope to survive without someone watching his back. There's strength in numbers. Together hunters stand, divided they fall.

Hunters also need to stick together because they must share their resources. People are chosen from all walks of life, with all kinds of skills, information and contacts. All of these resources must be called upon in the course of the hunt, and if imbued don't have them, they are vulnerable in their efforts against abominations. A hunter with friends among the police and perhaps even politicians is important for the influence he wields. A mechanic is invaluable for the transportation he provides, the quick-fix he can make to a get-away vehicle when zombie masses bear down, and for his potential to repair general equipment that might be damaged. A gang member is indispensable for her knowledge of the streets, the enemy's court and killing grounds. She can also acquire weapons and knows how to use them. Any one of these people trying to hunt alone would not last long. Sooner or later, he or she would need access to skills, information or contacts that she does not possess, but that others do.

Hunters also need each other for perhaps the simplest reason of all: a sense of belonging. Being imbued, knowing the truth of reality amid a sea of people who are blind to it, makes hunters outcasts, outsiders. Unless they previously lived all of their lives that way, the alienation they now experience is perhaps their greatest opponent. Monsters can be destroyed, but loneliness and self-defeat can be impossible to resist. Hunters therefore need to turn to each other, no matter how adept they become, no matter how potent their edges are. Monsters, death and isolation are still terrifying no matter how capable a hunter is. The chosen therefore stick together just to remind themselves of their inherent value and humanity.

Imbued who throw themselves headlong into their personal mission, though, ones who dismiss their vulnerability and live for the hunt alone, lose touch with their humanity. For some hunters this tendency occurs as a result of inbred nihilism or self-revulsion. Such behavior was usually exhibited *before*, but now it's compounded to match the intensity of the World of Darkness revealed. Yet these characters are still human, despite what they may believe, and have some soft spot or glimmer of hope. Although these chosen may avoid human contact or working with other hunters, they tend to resign themselves to it sooner or later, even if other hunters must come to them.

Other imbued lose touch because they literally stop being human. A character whose primary Virtue score rises significantly high begins to embody the objectives and beliefs of the Messengers rather than his own identity. The process begins as high-Virtue hunters develop derangements (see p. 203). However, when a character's primary Virtue rating reaches 10, she is for all intents and purposes a machine of the cause. Previous values, loves, hopes and dreams no longer matter. Only the hunt and the precepts of the character's primary Virtue are important. The character goes on to pursue the hunt according to the tenets of her creed — Judge, perhaps — with the goals of her Virtue in mind — say, destroying the enemy — but does so by means that are unfathomable to "lesser" hunters. For this Judge, seeking the greatest good in a situation might mean killing people and monsters to ensure that the monsters are exterminated. After all, isn't the greatest good still accomplished for the human race as a whole? A Martyr with 10 Mercy might believe that everyone should give of themselves for the hunt, and she "volunteers" people to make sacrifices. An Innocent might turn his attention to all kinds of corruption, supernatural or otherwise. Perhaps ordinary people are no longer to be tolerated if their hearts and minds aren't in the right place.

Such an extremist hunter only *seems* human anymore; his mind and soul are beyond. Indeed, he is so far gone that other hunters might feel the need to put him down like the rest of the unknown. Such a character becomes a virtual narrative tool, a possible enemy for other characters, a mystery as to what lies at the extremes of hunter obsession, and as a warning of what lengths *not* to go to. If you think a player is up to the challenge of roleplaying such a character realistically and compellingly, you can leave it in his hands. The tension that results with other troupe characters is certainly dramatic as they try to rationalize or reconcile with the wacko among them, and he simply tries to comprehend them (or doesn't try at all).

So what is the lesson extremists teach to other hunters? Remain grounded. Remember who and what you hunt for, and don't lose sight of those values. Above all, retain your humanity. Stay among people to remember humility. And stay among fellow hunters to make sure that others learn those lessons, too.

So when tensions among characters rise over decisions, goals, race, culture, gender, gender preference or just basic values, remind characters of why they need to stick together. Confront individual hunters with monsters that they can't deal with alone. Maybe the key to confronting that thing is information or an ability possessed by another group member. A reunion could be in order. Painful isolation and despair might be too much for separated hunters to bear. The death of a family member could bring home the point that a hunter really can't go home again, at least not to his "natural" home. His adopted one may be another story. Or, a loner hunter might cross paths with a true extremist among the imbued, a hunter with a vision for the war that's so warped that it's incomprehensible to the character. There might be comfort in the wacko's company for a little while, but when unacceptable prices are demanded of the character or defenseless people, "former" allies may not seem so bad. In fact, they may be needed to confront this lunatic.

Keeping hunter characters together throughout your chronicle really isn't much of a problem, then. Players and characters tend to recognize the need for alliances when they glimpse the abyss that is conducting the hunt alone. The larger world proves more dangerous and daunting than do the simple differences posed by other imbued.

Introducing New Hunters

Sooner or later, players' characters are driven off, made invalids, debilitated emotionally or mentally, or killed. It's a fact of hunter life — and death. That means players create new characters. New players might also join your troupe. In either case, you need to introduce new characters. Fortunately, **Hunter** has no experience levels or relative power factors to consider among characters; monsters are sufficiently pervasive that all kinds are encountered everywhere. Hunters don't pick and choose targets with which to contend based on the challenge (well, most don't anyway). They respond to *all* creatures, some of which are mindless or weak, others of which are potent and deadly. The point is, in a reality of ages-old evil incarnate, the truly powerful among the enemy are a threat to *all* hunters, regardless of edges possessed or information known.

So introduce new hunters to your chronicle whenever you like or need. If there are experienced imbued in the group, they can teach newcomers everything they need to know. After that, it's up to each hunter to persevere and survive.

New characters can have been imbued apart from the rest of the group and meet with the others in the simple course of the story. It's best to take the player aside and tell his own prelude so that his character has an introduction to the setting as the rest of the group did. After the newly imbued comes to grips with what he has become — perhaps through his own pre-game narrative or short stories — he may meet the group while attempting his own hunting efforts. Or maybe the newcomer searches for others of his kind and happens upon the group, which has been at the hunt for some time. He may even have learned the arts of war himself — you allow a player to create a character with a few "free" experience points under his belt — and has something to offer would-be allies.

The most dramatic way to introduce a new character to your game is through a spontaneous imbuing. The Messengers awaken a normal human in the presence of the other players' characters, and in the vicinity of a monster or more. This kind of welcome is exciting because the new character is subjected to truths about the real world that most imbued take weeks or months to experience; the new hunter is born to a built-in support group that can educate, shepherd and direct him. Here's a chance for battle-weary hunters to ease a person into the reality that they were thrown into so callously. Here's an opportunity to gain a new ally with untold skills and contributions. Here's a chance to turn to yet someone else who will one day understand what hunters must deal with, and who can help support those who came before.

Of course, not all acting hunters want to initiate a newly imbued. The stranger might seem a liability rather than a boon. Existing characters might suggest that the newcomer ignore and forget everything he sees and hears in order to hold onto his former life. The recently chosen hunter may therefore not join the established group for a while in game time. However, the compelling facts of the true World of Darkness inevitably motivate the new character to understand what's happened to him and his surroundings. The newly imbued probably comes back to the characters as his only hope in desperate times. Even the most jaded of hunters is hard pressed to resist such a needy case. Or the spurned character might even set out on his own and survive. He becomes an accomplished hunter in his own right, and it's only a matter of time before he runs into those who once denied him. He can savor the poetic justice when the others now need his help, or he can swallow his pride when he must still solicit the aid of his previous detractors.

An initiate isn't necessarily the only one moved and affected by a surprise imbuing, one that occurs within an existing chronicle. Witnessing an awakening can spark memories and rekindle emotions that even a hardened hunter may have thought buried. The shock, revulsion, fervor, compassion, dismay and confusion that a newly imbued character displays may force existing characters to recall their own preludes. You could even recreate and roleplay scenes from characters' previous lives, past episodes that the transformation calls up. Trained hunters might believe themselves facing the same creature that brought about their own change, only to recognize it afterward as a different monster — and to realize that a new hunter has been created. The feelings and memories dredged up might even compel characters to take the newly imbued under their wing; an undeniable bond is formed by all the characters' awakening. Maybe the new character has the Mentor Background in the form of one or more fellow characters. The potential for dramatic roleplaying in a spontaneous imbuing is enormous. Make the most of it for all players and characters, new and old.

Developing New Edges

When characters immerse themselves in the hunt and live to tell the tale, they inevitably gain more Virtue points, and therefore more edges. Virtue points have no obvious bearing on the mechanics of the game or on the personality of a character until she acquires a very high score in her primary Trait and becomes less human, more a vessel for the Messengers. Edges, on the other hand, are clear and obvious manifestations of acquiring authority and capability in the hunt. But because new edges are not trained for, researched or taught — they're not acquired by spending experience points — how do characters get them and know the powers are in their possession?

Edges are the direct result of advancing the Messengers' purpose in the war against the supernatural. As a character's

Virtue ratings rise, she may gain new and varied edges. The player may choose how to spend his character's Virtue points, but the character herself asks for no new powers. Nor does she implore the Heralds to bestow new capabilities upon her. In story terms, new edges are simply handed down to hunters by the enigmatic Messengers. It's up to a character to discover her new resources and to learn to master them.

Characters can recognize new edges in the same ways that they discover all of their powers after the imbuing (see Manifesting Other Edges, p. 235). The means by which new edges appear and are discovered depends on the nature of your story or chronicle, and the identity of the character in question. A trauma such as a barely averted car accident might trigger a power never displayed before. An unexpected or emotional monster confrontation, say with a family member, might activate a new power. The simple act of carrying out the hunt may suddenly put a new weapon at a character's disposal. The paranoia theme of your chronicle may suggest that a power develops after a series of unprecedented Messenger-imposed visions, all portraying the hunter becoming something more than human; these intrusive beings are out to get the character, and here's physical proof.

After deciding how to introduce a character's new power, consider *when* it appears. A player chooses what new edge he'd like his character to have, but she exhibits that power only when you say. New edges may manifest during downtime, between stories. The development occurs almost as an afterthought: "In the days that follow, you notice your vision gains some kind of clarity, as if you can see details that not even second sight reveals." By the time the next story begins, the character has fully developed her new edge.

Or new powers may arise during the events of a story. Introducing powers in this way can be treated much like the initial power that a hunter wields at her imbuing. The capability can activate on its own, triggered unconsciously. The character suddenly finds herself able to use and control it. Alternatively, the character uses the power unwittingly and only realizes what's happened after the events surrounding the activation settle. Whether a hunter is frightened by the manifestation of a new capability is up to her identity and roleplaying. However, at this stage in a character's hunting career, the appearance of new powers is evidence that unseen forces are still at work and a greater struggle remains to be fought. New powers are probably not as traumatizing as they were during the imbuing itself.

If you want, new edges can require training and practice before a character can use them automatically or with precision. Like any skill, using edges takes effort and training. It may be some time before a character demonstrates complete control over an edge. You could even require that experience be spent to reflect such training; perhaps one or two points' worth per level of the edge in question. Difficulties may be inflated or edge dice pools reduced until full control is achieved. In a fast-paced game, powers may just come naturally to characters; they can bring all edge effects to bear right away.

Finally, you have authority over what edges players may choose and characters may have. If the theme of your chronicle is revenge, edges along the Innocent path may be off limits. Indeed, dots in the Mercy Virtue may be denied characters. If the group already includes two adherents of Zeal, other characters' wielding Avenger edges may be overkill; characters' powers become repetitive and hunters' priorities blur. A Visionary character might not suit the Cleave power that his player wants. Or you might really need a character to possess a certain edge for a coming story, and request that a player takes it. If he chafes, goad him into it with promises of stardom in upcoming tales. Also, remember that characters' primary Virtue ratings cannot be exceeded by their other Virtue scores. A Redeemer with a 3 Mercy cannot have a 4 Zeal or Vision. Characters' highest rated edges in their creed paths cannot be exceeded by edges of other paths, either. That is, a Judge with the level-two edge of his creed cannot possess a level-three power from any other edge path. Ultimately, it's your chronicle. Work with players to decide the directions in which their characters grow.

The Spice of Life

Let's face it. Given the chance, we'd all like to take a peak at test answers before an exam, or see our own performance-review notes before meeting with the boss. Players are like that, too, only their sneak peeks are taken at chapters like this one and the one following, which reveal the secrets of your chronicle, and the powers and weaknesses of monsters. Unfortunately, doing so eliminates the charm of playing a hunter awoken to a new world; players know things their characters don't. The extreme of this condition is players who know the other Storyteller games, and all of monsters' capabilities. It can be difficult for these players to separate player knowledge from character knowledge: "I know that's a vampire, not a zombie as the Storyteller is leading me to believe."

Players who possess too much information but play along with you can still enjoy **Hunter**. They play dumb and enjoy the naiveté of their characters. The ones who don't play along ruin the game for everyone by announcing their forbidden knowledge: "Look out, it's a feral *vampire*, not a werewolf!"

Fortunately, there's a way to deal with spoilsports. The same method also helps informed-but-mute players to enjoy the game even more. Break the rules. Give monsters powers that they shouldn't have. Let ghosts take solid form. Make shapechanging a disease spread through infection rather than a blessing or curse passed down through heredity. Let the walking dead disappear underground to reappear elsewhere. If you make up or swap powers and abilities of creatures, the playing field changes completely. Suddenly, "educated" players are as ignorant as their characters. Loud-mouthed characters look like idiots, especially when their "informed opinions" prove to be utterly false — and may even result in a person's (even a hunter's) death. Your **Hunter** game is yours. Don't let

players run roughshod over it, and help everyone have a good time. If that means bending or breaking the rules for the sake of the story, go for it.

The Full Story Spectrum

The typical hunter identity quickly lends itself to violence. The most common and easiest response to the supernatural is to fight it, and to flee if it can't be beaten. A lot of hunters, especially Zealots, concentrate on hit-and-run tactics, mainly because they operate with the notion that all creatures are inhuman by default and must be destroyed. However, not all monsters have forgotten their once-mortal existence, and some may actually sympathize with mankind even as they are forced to prey upon it. Likewise, not all hunters want to destroy everything they come across; the Merciful and Visionary often want to understand and help night creatures. There is therefore a spectrum of hunter mentality and activity, with violence simply at one end.

Why, then, let your **Hunter** stories devolve into body-armor-and-shell-casing extravaganzas? There are so many other tales to tell, based on mystery, investigation, drama, human values, passion and maybe even love. Sure, emptying clips makes for exciting scenes, but relentless violence becomes boring. The success of a **Hunter** chronicle rests on combining and mixing events so that all the stories under the rainbow can be told. A lot of investigation and research makes an action scene all the more rewarding when characters have worked toward staging it. Bullets might not help when loved ones are the targets. And kicking ass holds no thrill when the characters are just as merciless as their opponents.

The following are some story ideas to help you flesh out the potential of your chronicle. Muzzle flashes might occur here and there, but each of these concepts is designed to force players to think and roleplay before they make Firearms rolls.

- A character's family member or friend has disappeared. Following a winding trail that suggests a bizarre string of events, the characters find her only to discover that she has been turned into a vampire — and that she embraces her new existence. Can the related character bear to destroy her, or must he allow her to exist? Does he try to save her against her wishes? Do other hunters, perhaps even in the same group, seek to destroy her, and thus need to be stopped? Where does a hunter's own life end and his calling begin?

- The characters discover that an important official is secretly a rot. His minions cover up his "indiscretions," but the hunters are on to him. To attack the official outright

would attract the attention of mortal authorities, the rot's servitors, and any allies he has. The result might be the deaths or ongoing pursuit of the characters, and perhaps the compromising of the imbued as a whole. The characters' investigation, however, proves that the official has close criminal ties. If his corruption can be revealed, he might be abandoned by his supporters and hung out to dry — easy prey for the people who set him up.

• Some kind of new nocturnal faction has arrived in town and a power struggle is under way. Normally, that would be fine — let the deaders and wolfmen kill each other. However, innocent people are caught in the crossfire, and the police are covering it up. The imbued at least know their resident adversaries. There's no telling who the new ones are. Do the characters make a tentative alliance with their traditional enemies to oppose the newcomers — better the devil they know? Or could the new faction wipe out the old, giving the hunters the edge of being an unknown factor themselves?

• Local gang kids are running drugs and guns. Little do they know that they're funded by nightstalkers. The kids aren't the characters' true enemy, but they don't tolerate the hunters' interference and defend their hidden masters. All-out warfare would destroy the neighborhood and could result in only human deaths. Can the characters make the punks see the light? Do the gang's suppliers have a weakness that can be used to expose or undermine them? Do characters have to infiltrate the gang to discover its patrons? Can the kids be saved before they prove their worth to their masters and join the rot legions?

• A reporter investigates a local figure whom the hunters know to be the enemy. They are watching him, too, gathering information and awaiting an opportunity to strike. The reporter endangers their plan by visiting "crime" scenes and snooping around operations. Can the characters solicit the reporter's aid without revealing their own nature? Is she a reliable source of information or a troublemaker? Can she be trusted, or might she blow the lid off the whole thing before the imbued can act? If the hunters reveal the *truth* to her, does she turn her full attention on them and hunter culture in general?

• Miraculously, one terminal patient after another makes a dramatic, inexplicable recovery at a local hospital. Each is healthy, alert, even robust. Of course, it's all too good to be true. The hunters soon discover those same patients victimizing other people for blood or spirit energy. Can the characters destroy these "monsters" who lived such miserable lives and have found peace only now? And who made the former patients what they are? Its motives seem to have been good, if misguided. Are the characters able to track down the "miracle worker," and, if so, does it deserve saving or terminating? Can hunters in the same circle even agree?

• A gruesome string of deaths sends up all the warning signs of a nightstalker's rampage. The characters investigate only to discover that the "monster" is a homicidal *human*. Is killing other humans the domain of the imbued? Is that their purpose? Is judging fellow mortals the role intended by the Messengers? Matters grow worse when the killer turns out to be a hunter gone rogue. If the characters put him down, are they any better? Could they become the same? Can the wacko be rehabilitated?

• As characters wipe out a bloodsucker nest, they are confronted by one who was changed recently. She struggles with her new existence and longs to be normal again. Do the characters have it in them to save her? Does word of their sympathy get out, forcing them to run a gauntlet of hunters to get the vampire safely out of the city? How far are the characters willing to go to save one person? Must others be hurt or killed in the process, and is that price worth the end?

• Hunters in the city are dying one by one, killed in their homes and workplaces. Someone is selling out the imbued! There can be only so many in the area, and characters investigate those they know. Ironically, the trail leads to one of the very characters in the group. He has fallen prey to a monster's mind control and subconsciously releases information on his allies. Even if the hunter's tormentor is disposed of, can the character be trusted again? And do other hunters respect the group's decision to let him live?

• In their pursuit of a horrific beast, the characters capture one of its servants in hopes of gaining more information. The lowly creature is hurt grievously, though, and is in no condition to even speak — at least, not yet. The hunters could simply kill the toady, but then they'd have no leads. To what lengths will they go to nurse the creature back to "health"? Feed it blood? Give it the fear or pain of innocents on which it thrives? Do the characters seek other sources of information and use the convalescing pawn to test the legitimacy of intelligence and other leads? What does the creature demand in return for betraying its master? Do the hunters learn sympathy for the creature in its weakened condition? If so, will they protect it when the master's other goons come searching for the missing agent?

• A braggart hunter claims to have destroyed a powerful, local creature. His story has enough of a truthful ring to be legitimate. If the creature is destroyed, its secrets are up for grabs to whomever can claim them. However, winning the prize means venturing into the creature's lair and dealing with any traps or defenses that may await. Other monsters may be after the same goal, too. Indeed, other hunters may be after the being's secrets, and they might not want to share with the characters (not all imbued have the same motives). Can the characters outwit the enemy and the traps arranged for them? Is the monster really dead or was word of his destruction merely bait for a larger trap? Can the characters use their knowledge of the truth against the rivals with whom they race?

• A bystander, exposed to how the world really is, uses the knowledge for his own gain rather than for humanity's good. He gathers evidence against the people who were at

the scene of his awakening, and he blackmails them. The characters must learn who knows their secret and has information about their activities, which could be released to the press. Even if pictures would never get through monsters' control of the media, those pictures would betray the hunters to their enemy. How can characters destroy the evidence against them while on the run? If evidence has also been gathered against some monsters, are the characters willing to make a deal with the enemy to discover the source of their mutual threat?

Storytelling the Messengers

Perhaps one of the greatest mysteries of **Hunter: The Reckoning** in player and character minds is: "Who or what are the Messengers?" There are all kinds of answers, some of which are patently wrong, others that are partially correct, and still others that are on the money. Hunters attribute their rousing from the slumbering world, the bestowing of their abilities, and the charge imposed upon them to many sources. Some look to themselves and humanity in general. The voices that hunters hear and the startling sensations they have are the products of some portion of the unconscious mind becoming conscious, maybe due the next stage in human evolution. Or abilities that have lain dormant in mankind for centuries are suddenly awakened because an ancient war with "mythical" creatures must be fought again. Or sheer determination and will activates the ability to heal the world's injuries.

Other hunters attribute their revelations and gifts to the work of outside, unearthly forces. Aliens have arrived to create warriors to combat a universal enemy. God or some divinity has reached down to select worthy individuals to cleanse the Earth. The Devil or some extraordinary Evil afflicts people with suffering like that endured by Job. Those who can resist the punishment and take up the cause against Evil are worthy of salvation. A rebellion is being staged by the world's governments or secret agencies to create an army to combat the real powers at work. Or, individuals who have stumbled upon the secret agendas of world governments are deluded into believing that monsters are real.

In order to tell convincing stories, you as Storyteller need to know which if any of these Messenger interpretations is accurate. Otherwise, how can you create a convincing background and setting for your chronicle? The true nature of the Messengers is shared here, but understand that not all their secrets are revealed. Even these forces have hidden agendas and private affairs that unfold only with time.

The Messengers are cosmological powers in the World of Darkness universe; they're forces of nature. Various human cultures and societies have sensed or guessed at these beings throughout human history. They can be likened to gods, deities or celestials. The terms "angels," "fates," "muses" and "spirits" are applied to them by many hunters, and by people in general. These forces have overseen reality since its beginning, but which came first, these beings or the universe, is unknown. In their roles as caretakers, the Messengers have affected human and Earthly affairs on a grand scale previously. In particular, an age in which human heroes fought demons and supernatural creatures has been brought about at least once by these entities. The reasons for their interference in human affairs and apparent intervention against the supernatural are unknown, but to anyone who can perceive the Heralds' actions, they appear to be at work again in the modern age with the creation of hunters.

As celestial spirits, the Messengers certainly have the capacity to be malevolent toward mankind and hunters. They certainly cannot empathize with the insignificant and relatively impotent speck that is each hunter. And yet, the Heralds inflict no specific harm upon the imbued beyond arousing them to the true conditions of their world. Obviously this awakening causes its own suffering, alienation and torment, but any subsequent harm that befalls hunters is at the hands of the creatures they face, not at the hands of the creatures that open their eyes. If anything, the Messengers encourage the imbued to take up the cause against the supernatural as befits those people's beliefs. (Indeed, some hunters speculate that the Messengers' values reflect the three camps — based on the Virtues — that seem to form among the imbued. Thus, the Heralds choose those with beliefs like their own.)

The Messengers' ultimate purpose for the World of Darkness is to impose a reckoning upon the monsters, creatures and abominations that have dominated and controlled humanity for ages. It's as if these forces intend to clean the world's slate of corruption personified, using humanity as the tool of destruction. To what end this cleansing must occur is for the Heralds to know. However, some religious accounts of such a reckoning foretell it as the completion of the cycle of life, perhaps the end of the world as we know it. Yet humanity seems to have an instrumental role in accomplishing this goal. Perhaps mankind is therefore not meant to suffer the same fate as the creatures that would be obliterated.

So the Heralds are not hunters' real enemy, despite the pain they inflict upon people by opening their minds and endowing them with strange powers. But how do *you* convince players and characters that their benefactors can be trusted, or at least are not the greatest threat at work? The best way is to *show* characters the ultimate good that comes of otherworldly intervention. The Heralds never come down and say, "Hey, trust us. We're the good guys." They convey the same sentiment through a variety of means that you can work into your roleplaying and stories.

When hunters are imbued, and when they pursue the hunt thereafter, a certain undeniable sense of righteousness, clarity, epiphany or joy comes with the experience. Activating second sight, using edges and risking Conviction points in edge rolls all offer hunters a subtle reassurance that *their* might makes right. To make your point, liken these feelings to sentiments players could understand from their own

experience. Extending the hand of salvation to an apparently horrific creature might remind a character (and player) of the peace she felt when she had her child. Striking down evil might infuse a character (and player) with the same conviction he felt when he rose up against a childhood bully. Deducing the solution to a supernatural threat might overcome a character (and player) with the same sense of reward he felt when he graduated college. Coin hunters' vigor for or gratification in the hunt in terms that players also find compelling, and they will share their characters' intuitive trust in the Messengers.

Certainly characters' empowering could be interpreted as an illusion or trick meant to make hunters dupes or puppets. However, only characters with the tenacity, will, compassion or insight to endure the truth of the World of Darkness are chosen to be imbued. Closed-minded, weak or deluded people — those who would kill themselves or go mad in the face of monsters — do not number among hunters (although just the opposite may seem true to the imbued). Looking back on their old lives, beliefs and morals, thoughtful hunters realize that their values really don't change after the imbuing. Indeed, the tenets by which they used to live are now the guidelines and benchmarks for measuring their new purpose and direction. A person who used to be objective, austere and purposeful now embodies those features when he applies them to the supernatural as a Judge. A person who took everyone and everything at face value, without question or suspicion, now offers that same latitude to any salvageable creature as an Innocent. Players who believe their characters tainted or abused by the Messengers might therefore reconsider after comparing "old" identities with "new." Hunters' identities and sentiments remain the same as always. The context in which they apply their convictions has simply changed. How, then, can characters be "puppets" when their will still prevails?

Of course, some characters (and players) don't need convincing to perceive an inherent good to the imbuing and the forces behind it. These people often put extraordinary faith in themselves or a higher power in normal life. Maybe they were extremely independent. Perhaps religion was the foundation of their lives. The basis of such characters' conviction doesn't matter. What matters is that these people now have the wherewithal to act upon their beliefs and accomplish the goals they always aspired to. A fiercely self-reliant single parent now has what it takes to provide for family in the mundane world — and in this frightening new one. A religious devotee suddenly hears a higher calling, as she is made aware of a world where her strength and compassion are sorely needed. A dreamer who always believed there had to be more to existence than the mere day to day now discovers a universe in which existence is tenuous at best. He realizes that spirit and determination, not malaise, are required to preserve life and freedom. For people with such personal conviction, the Messengers are

simply aspects of a bigger picture; they're not an enemy or even necessarily a concern. The Messengers are simply tools like hunters themselves, beings required to make sure the big picture hangs straight.

The Hunter Theme

The idea or concept that encapsulates the Messenger's will for humanity and the chosen — the premise that is hunters' ultimate driving force — is "Inherit the Earth." When hunters are imbued, they're made to realize that the environment they've always lived and believed in is a construct, a veil that hides the existence of monsters who are the real powers that be. There's no telling how long humanity has been under these creatures' heel; perhaps centuries or millennia. The truth is, monsters have always existed, and they have always lived among and preyed upon mankind.

The Messengers seek to make the supernatural answer for its persecution of humanity. Hunters are their means of doing so. The imbued are meant to take back the night and reclaim the Earth or a world where the mere *natural* can exist unto itself.

Suddenly confronted with knowledge of their oppression by *things*, hunters are automatically aware of the Messenger agenda, whether they realize it or not. To the imbued, monsters' atrocities cannot be allowed. The creatures must be stopped; survival and freedom demand it. The result of this cohesion of purpose is an intuitive hunter imperative to find (or make) a world for mankind to exist beyond the reach of monsters.

For those who bring anger to and who demand action in the hunt, this world already exists: the Earth, which must be wrested from creatures' control. That's why Zealots are so prepared and well-armed for war with the supernatural.

For those who bring compassion and forgiveness to the hunt, a world worth saving must be tolerant and peaceful. Perhaps that world can be found only when wanton evil is eliminated or this world ends. The Merciful offer hope and grace to the people — and even monsters — willing to share it, in hopes of finding a better place. Creatures that refuse an offered hand seal their own fate.

For those who question the direction and meaning of the hunt, a world worth saving could be anything: this world, the next, a continent, the future, another planet, the Internet. Human freedom might not be limited to anything so conventional as the Earth. These hunters suffer no preconceived notions, and so may find worlds to inherit that no other hunter can. That's why Visionaries stand apart from other hunters, question their motives and are perhaps the greatest leaders among the imbued.

You can bring the Messengers' "Inherit the Earth" theme to the forefront of your games by making players and characters ask the question, "Why?" Why is the supernatural so clearly wrong? Why must monsters be countered? Why is taking a stand important? Forcing players and characters to answer these questions makes them consider the long-term goals of their actions: "Where does opposing the supernatural lead?" "What will be the result?" "What do we hope to achieve?" Sooner or later, the chain of questions probably leads to fundamental conclusions about human rights and liberties. Monsters are wrong because torture, condemnation, slavery and tyranny are wrong. If those crimes compose the supernatural itinerary for humanity's existence, then something must be done. A new order and a new world must be forged where human freedom and prosperity are upheld, not downtrodden. When characters make these realizations, "Inherit the Earth" may become the flag to which they rally. That's when **Hunter**'s theme becomes the single most tangible aspect of your chronicle. That's when the Messengers turn from suspicious beings to allies.

Elements of Storytelling

Now that we've covered the unique storytelling aspects of **Hunter**, we get into storytelling in general: How to create a story or chronicle and keep it running. It doesn't matter if a story is told on stage, on film or in the pages of a book, all stories have something happening somewhere to someone. That is, every story has elements of plot, setting and character. In order to run a good game of **Hunter**, you need to be familiar with these tools and comfortable using them.

Setting

No story takes place in a vacuum. When characters deal with the environment around them, the interaction can reveal personality and identity just as strongly as can exchanges with other people. In fact, sometimes dealing with the environment is *more* revealing. There are numerous literary stories, for example, with only one major character. He or she is pitted against inhuman or inanimate challenges. *The Old Man and the Sea* and "To Build a Fire" spring to mind.

Hunter's setting is the World of Darkness. This realm offers a wealth of background material for use in your games, but it's still a large milieu. Setting probably needs to be narrowed down for your stories. Most **Hunter** exploits take place in cities (where prey is common and hunters can hide amid the human masses), but what part of the city do you use? The sleek, aloof skyscrapers of the business district? The trashy, bleak slums? The impersonally comfortable suburbs? Each has its possibilities, and each lends a very different flavor to the stories that develop there.

Setting is concrete: Physical locations not only create atmosphere, they make action more exciting. A fight in an abandoned house is a cliché. How about a fight at a car dealership? There are acres of vehicles to dodge into, under and around. You have showrooms fronted by plate-glass windows and full of new models. Around back are repair bays, stocked with tools, hydraulic lifts, high-intensity lights, generators, racks of tires and many, *many* types of flammable

or caustic fluids. Why slug it out with the walking dead in a haunted house when you can pin them under a brand-new SUV and set the whole thing on fire?

Setting is also ephemeral: It conveys qualities like tone and atmosphere that are very important to stories (especially to horror stories, and to a game that focuses on character) but difficult to point at directly. Tone and atmosphere are hard to grasp, but that doesn't make them less vital.

Envisioning Setting

The most obvious and most important element of setting is your description of places and objects. It's very easy to underplay characters' surroundings: "You're in a dark forest at night," is considered good enough for a lot of Storytellers. It shouldn't be. Consider this, instead:

The sun is going down behind the trees, and cutting shadows across the ground like prison bars. The temperature has dropped, and the cold wind leaves your lungs feeling raw. The uneven ground is thick with decaying autumn leaves — the top layer red and crunchy, but with a strong smell of mold and decay rising from the sodden layers beneath. Your steps rustle and crack hidden twigs. Every noise you make sounds loud and foreign in your ears. You strain — is that the sound of howling wolves, or just the wind? Everything you try to hear is drowned out by the noise of your own feet.

On one level, this description tells the players that the ground is bumpy, that it's cold, dark and late in the year. On another, it imposes the feeling that the characters don't belong there. That description never comes out and says, "you feel uncomfortable in the woods" — but it doesn't need to.

Some artists draw every brick in a wall because they know the bricks are there. More skilled painters can indicate the bricks through a few lines and areas of color. You can use a similar technique to quickly sketch the details of a scene. Pick out a few elements of the setting that are typical of the whole, a few items or details that convey what you want players to know. Describe those in particular and they stand in for an exhaustive (and boring) catalogue of a room's contents.

Suppose the characters have entered a vampire's lair during the daytime. The vampire hasn't been undead for very long — she still has ties to her human life. There's a conflict between her new nature as a blood-hunting monster, and her memories of life as a normal person. The objects in her home, their arrangement, the details — all of these can imply the conflict that the characters have no way of just *knowing*. Suppose your players have also latched onto the idea that vampires have preternaturally keen senses. This idea — that their prey can sense them before they sense *it* — has been a major source of discomfort. Naturally, you decide to play it up.

The door opens on oiled hinges, yet you flinch because the apartment is whisper-quiet — the thick door and walls provide an effective barrier to all sound. It's dark inside — not a single shaft of daylight can penetrate the heavy curtains. The only possible illumination comes from candles and oil lamps, now dark. Every light bulb has been unscrewed. There's a mild smell of disinfectant in the air and a faint buzzing sound from somewhere.

Except for its darkness and silence, the apartment appears normal. There are books on the shelves — romance novels mostly. Photographs line the walls in cheap plastic frames — pictures from weddings, vacations and graduation ceremonies. You see her in several of them — smiling, her arms around people who look like brothers, sisters, friends.

As you step into the living room, the buzzing becomes louder and the disinfectant scent more intense. When you open the bathroom door, you see why: There's no longer a bloodstain on the tiles, but the grout between them bears traces, rust-red and dry. The buzz is the sound of flies crawling on the floor, and on a wastebasket containing a bag. The bag is tied shut, but the flies circle its neck. The scent of disinfectant is strong here. Underneath it is a smell like roadkill or an old grease trap — a smell coming from the trash bag....

Individual details are good for individual scenes. However, if you think on a larger scale, you can tie all the details together into larger schemes. For instance, you might pay particular attention to the lighting you describe for each scene. Is it harsh, dim, vibrant, glaring, pitch black? Also, make sure that the lighting description is appropriate to the action of the scene. If every fight takes place in glaring, blinding brilliance, battles have a different feel than if they take place in disorienting shadows. Your players may not consciously connect lighting with action (and if they do, it may be time to switch to a more subtle technique), but they may become nervous whenever a description is similar to that of previous unpleasant encounters. They won't know why, but they'll know bright lights are *bad*.

It doesn't have to be lighting. Use whatever descriptive element you want to establish setting and create mood. The technique or element you use doesn't even have to be the same for each character, either. A character's Abilities and Backgrounds indicate her interests. You can use those to determine what a character would notice about a place. An expert cook notices takeout cartons, unwashed dishes and the smell of rancid food. A master criminal instinctively looks for valuables — or hiding places. A musician wants to know what CDs are piled by the stereo. All of these details offer information about what has happened in an area, and about the personality of the person who was there.

Tone

A game's *tone* conveys the general feeling of events. In written fiction, it's often created by word choice. In cinema, it's handled with camera approach and character reaction. When someone gets beaten up in *They Live*, it doesn't have the gut-wrenching feeling of the torture scene from *Reservoir Dogs*. The difference is intended; both movies have distinct tones. One is lighthearted and over the top, the other sleazy and intense. Pick a tone for your games

and keep it at the back of your mind while describing people, scenes and events. Is your game brooding and methodical, where each act squeezes the vise tighter around the characters until they explode at the climax? Is it frantic and hysterical, with the characters always attacking or retreating, never having a moment to rest and gather their thoughts? Is it tense and suspicious, with a calm outward appearance concealing murky intrigues and hidden violence? Picking a general tone for a story or chronicle gives your **Hunter** game a coherence that only strengthens the more you play.

The trick to using tone is: Keep it consistent. There's room for different emotions in the same tone structure (especially if they're used as brief moments of contrast), but having a predictable tone lets your players suspect (and dread) what comes next. Tone can therefore be a powerful tool for building suspense.

You can demonstrate your chosen tone with your voice. Even if your word choice is identical, a scene that's described in a flat monotone or an ironic sneer has a different feel from the same scene described in a tense whisper.

You can convey tone with word choice, as well. If your tone is confusion and distrust, long sentences full of complicated words can inspire those feelings. If you go for a bleak, heartless and inflexible tone, short words with hard syllables create that impression. Words full of hisses and sibilance create a feeling of suspicion and unease.

Finally, you can demonstrate tone through actions, the people they involve and the settings where they take place. (More on this appears under Plot and Character, below.)

Atmosphere

Where tone is "what things mean," atmosphere is more about "how things feel." Most immediately, how they look. Some artists portray everything with straight lines and hard, jutting angles. Others use curves and shades of color to create an entirely different effect. Pick a "look" for your setting, just as a movie director does for a film. (Ever notice how almost every episode of *The X-Files* has a scene in which flashlight beams pass through clouds of dust? That's no accident.) Because you describe events through storytelling rather than show them, you have a bigger set of tools for establishing atmosphere. It's not just look. It's the sounds the characters hear, what they smell, the texture of what they touch and the feeling in the air. It's everything that's all around them. That's why it's called atmosphere. Just like tone, a coherent, thought-out atmosphere can strengthen your chronicle by making its stories hang together.

While you think about how to describe a scene, pay attention to subtleties. Color choice can influence how a scene feels. A room that's draped in pastels makes a different impression than one that's naked gray concrete. Scents are an immediate and visceral way to create an impression. If someone's bedroom has a thick smell of jasmine incense, it creates a different feeling than fresh air and talcum powder. Similarly, temperature can be used to imply emotional states as well as physical ones. Fear is a shaky chill. Humiliation is an itchy, prickly heat that's completely distinct from the hot flush of anger or the warm glow of contentment.

Just as the tone of individual scenes can contribute to a story's overall tone, so it is with atmosphere. If you constantly describe items, buildings and people as "angular" "tall" and "lean," you paint a picture in the minds of players. They start to perceive — on a subconscious, pre-verbal level — the uncomfortable starkness of the world their characters inhabit. You can achieve an entirely different feel by relentlessly describing scenes as cluttered, dusty, filled with objects marked by unidentified smudges of matter. Going the other way — describing settings that are empty, barren, sterile — creates yet another atmosphere.

If you apply consistency to your descriptions, your game develops a feeling of coherence and completion. On the most practical level, consistency makes it easy for players to get into the swing of things at the beginning of each session. More importantly, constancy of atmosphere lets them understand the setting. Maybe they don't know everything about it, but it's familiar, even as it's scary and challenging.

From Concept to Use

Once you decide the general concept, tone and atmosphere of your setting, you have to help your players feel these foggy concepts. As is implied above, detail is critical. Just as important is the idea of *showing*, not *telling*. Playing **Hunter** is interactive. The players don't want to sit back and passively receive the story. They want to be involved and figure things out themselves. Your job is to give them the clues they need. Saying "Brandon Geddes is an evil man," is boring. Let the characters see Brandon Geddes at his worst. Not only do they draw their own conclusions, they know what *kind* of bad man he is. An unthinking brute who savages anyone who gets in his way? Calculating and unemotional, willing to do what it takes to reach his intellectual goals, but with no passion for his murders? A misguided maniac who believes that every vile act he does is in the service of an ultimate good? Maybe he's a vicious sadist whose "goals" exist only as dubious justifications for acts of cruelty.

Your chosen atmosphere and tone should be like air: invisible, unstated, but always present. Don't just tell players, "Oh, this game is going to emphasize sudden changes, unexpected twists and bizarre, unsettling events." Just *do* it. Similarly, you don't have to let players know about your chosen atmosphere, or even that there is one. You have to think about that stuff, but they don't. They *feel* it, instead.

So, to introduce these hidden strengths to your games, here's what you have to do:

• Decide on them in advance. Write them down. Jot down a few ideas for concrete details that imply your tone and atmosphere.

• Find other stuff with the right feel. Maybe you like the movie *Seven* and want to give your game the same gritty, freaky, morbid sense. Try to find other movies, novels or music with that same creepy aura. Examine them for what provides that emotion, and emulate it in your games. This process doesn't even have to be *conscious* — just being aware of the feeling you want to create shapes your voice, word choice and attitude in the right direction. It's inchoate and nonverbal, but it works.

• Keep choices in mind when preparing for your games. If you know several places the hunters are likely to go, think of how tone and atmosphere come through in those locations. If you know hunters are going to spend a lot of time with a particular Storyteller character, make sure you know how that person fits into the larger emotional environment of your story.

Sample Tones

Paranoia. The hunters know what's going on, but they can't convince the unthinking sheep who surround them. The undead have almost inconceivable influence over the world of the living, and they use it ruthlessly to suppress the truth about themselves. Everyone's either a dupe or an enemy. Anyone can betray you — often with the best intentions. ("Honey, these men are going to take you somewhere you can get the help you need.") Secrecy is your only hope. Trust no one.

As a paranoia-themed game progresses, make sure to keep removing things a character thinks she can rely on. The bank forecloses on her house, her kids are taken away by family services, her friends betray her (either deliberately or by being duped), and even her allies start to seem suspicious.

A few details that could create paranoia include:

• Infuriating events. Have the phone ring incessantly. When a character picks up the receiver, the person on the other end hangs up.

• Suspicious events. Long black sedans with tinted windows. There always seems to be one around, but they all have different license plates.

• Peculiar behavior. People stare at the characters in public, even when they aren't doing anything unusual.

It's Almost within Reach. The supernatural has hidden among normal people for ages, but its time has come. Technology makes monsters' advantages obsolete. All it takes is a cadre of dedicated, well-armed hunters to reveal them to the mortal world, and then the *real* purification can begin.

The twin themes of this concept are hope and frustration. Every time the characters *think* they almost have the problem solved, it becomes apparent that it's worse than feared. Knocking off relatively weak monsters brings hunters to the attention of stronger ones. Trying to reveal the machinations of the creatures teaches that the media — and police! — have been compromised. The harder the characters fight, the more they should realize the scope of their opposition. Early optimism is revealed as simple ignorance.

A few details that play well with this tone include:

• Fair-weather friends. People who seem willing to help, but who later bail or die.

• Solid friends. Good, decent hunter allies who really believe in The Cause.

• Layers of the onion. A few splashy early victories that mean less and less as the characters learn more about the world.

Hysteria and Confusion. There's is a frantic, frenzied race from desperate battle to hiding-hole, and back again. The characters get caught up in events and struggles beyond their comprehension and are tossed hither and yon by the forces involved. They're not movers and shakers; they're the moved and shaken, trying to find a way to survive until they figure out what's going on.

This can be an easy tone to run, but a hard one to maintain. It requires constant pressure, and that can become exhausting if unrelieved. The trick to making this work (and to making it fun) is to get the players to put pressure on themselves. If you attack the characters the first few times they *think* they're safe, pretty soon they *never* feel completely safe. Note that you shouldn't attack characters *every* time they stop to rest. Otherwise players get discouraged or characters start setting traps all the time. What you need to do is create the *fear* of imminent attack.

All the details from the paranoia tone can work here, too, but they need to be followed up immediately by enemy action. Other details that help:

• Unending opponents. The characters rarely see the same goon twice. Sure, there is a recurring big villain, but he or she always has a fresh supply of ruthless muscle to throw at the characters.

• Overwhelming forces. Make sure characters understand that sometimes they *have* to run. Make a blatant show of overwhelming force ("Out in the darkness, you can see at least 50 glowing eyes, coming in fast!") so hunters know their only chance of survival is to flee. When they win a fight, it should be because they were backed into a corner or because they planned a counterstrike carefully and well.

• Close to home. Kill characters' friends and neighbors. Anyone who helps them is a legitimate target. (You can also brainwash friends and neighbors for variety.)

The Dying of the Light. This approach doesn't cast hunters as hopeless so much as irrelevant. The unliving shrug off their attacks. When a zombie is cut down or a shapechanger is eliminated, another simply comes along to take its place. Eventually the characters start asking if it's even worth it. Nothing seems to make a difference. Nothing changes. Nothing gets better. A particularly effective way to work this tone is to have a sneaky undead creature use the

hunters as weapons against its enemies. When uncovered, this mastermind offers them a chance to make a real difference against the legions of the undead — but only against those who have offended the thing. The characters can refuse, of course, but then they have no direct opportunities to attack the creatures behind it all.

The biggest danger with this kind of tone is making enemies limitless and thus depressing players instead of characters. To avoid this undesirable result, make sure that you reward players when they have the guts to stick to their guns. Not *every* time characters do the right thing and refuse to give up the fight — that's too easy. Maybe one time in three or four, just enough to keep players and characters going.

Details that really bring out this tone include:

• Denial of comfort. Friends and loved ones who don't understand, and who *beg* a character to give up the fight (and probably to get some therapy).

• Separation from the past. Sacrifices for the hunt (money gets tight, a character misses his kid's school play, a lover leaves) that *do not pay off*. At least, not immediately.

• Reminders of pain. Even after injuries have healed on character sheets, old leg gashes twinge, a poorly healed broken arm stings, or that wrenched shoulder feels sore. The rules may not penalize characters, but make sure they know their bodies are being punished (after all, half the fun of an action movie is watching the hero keep going even though he's bruised and begrimed).

Sample Atmospheres

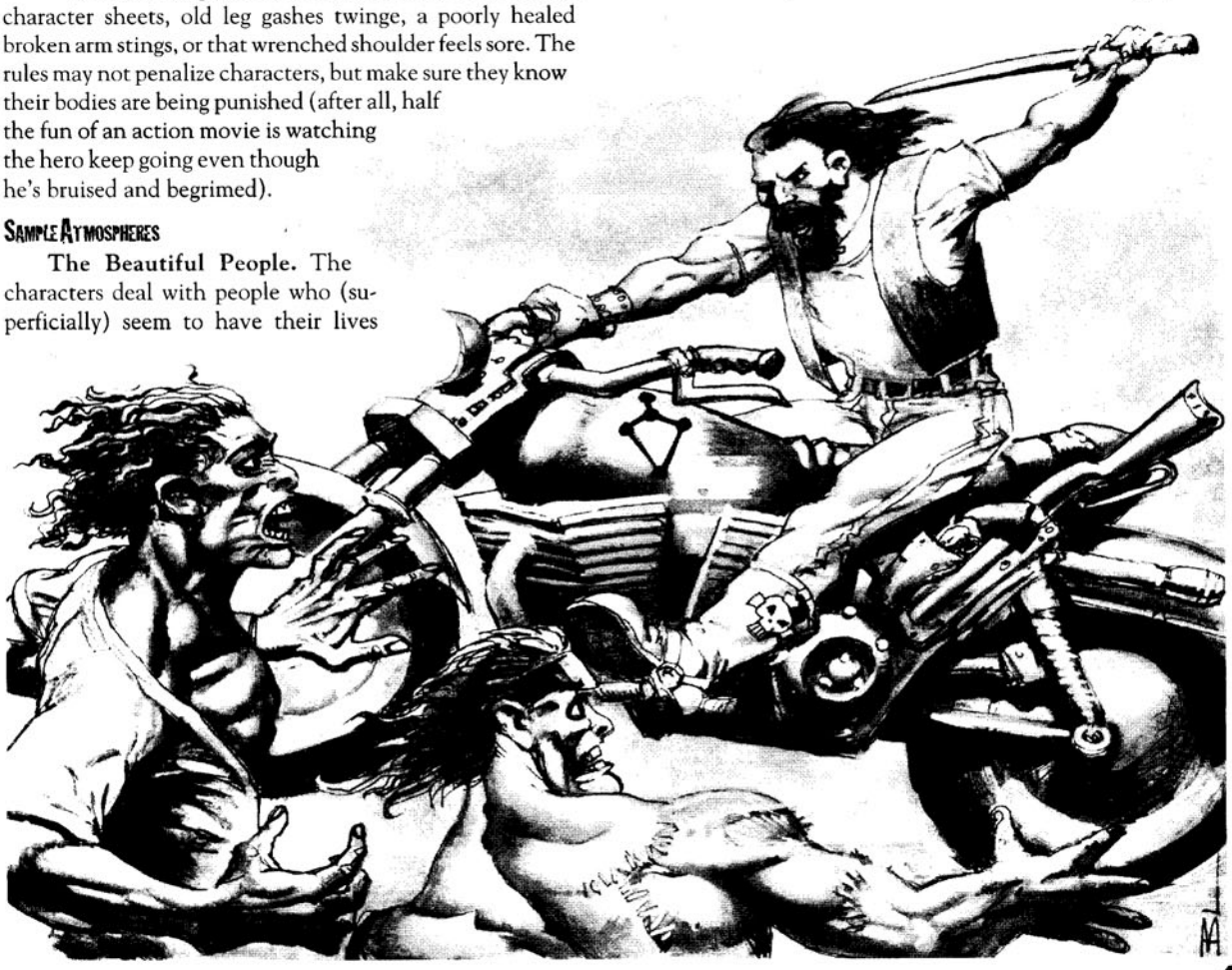
The Beautiful People. The characters deal with people who (superficially) seem to have their lives together. They're on the fast tracks in their careers, they have spending money and good taste, and the ugly details of life are beneath their notice. Too bad they have spirits hanging around like flies over a dead skunk.

This atmosphere is particularly good when used for contrast. Everything *looks* great — it's only when you pry up the lid that you realize these beautiful people have hideous problems. You can go one of two routes with this setup. One is that their fair façade hides moral corruption. The other is that they're defenseless people who must be protected from the supernatural dangers that their very beauty and happiness attract (there's no reason to pick one or the other, of course).

Details that emphasize an upper-class atmosphere include:

• Good looks. Emphasize again and again how everyone the characters meet is well dressed, has great hair, perfect skin, gorgeous clothes. Even the people who aren't blessed with attractive features had poise and grace hammered into them at finishing school.

• Blasé wealth. If you're rich and you knew only rich people as you grew up, you don't really care about status symbols like nice cars and expensive watches. You simply assume that *everyone* drives a Mercedes and has a cell phone



the size of a pinkie finger. This approach is especially effective if the players' characters *aren't* used to plush surroundings.

• Brand names. Hey, Madison Avenue has spent millions creating knee-jerk associations with certain brands. Check out Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* for an extreme example of this technique.

Down and Dirty. The exact opposite of the previous atmosphere casts the characters into a setting that concentrates on the disenfranchised and downtrodden — everyone from the marginalized, uneducated working class down to the genuinely homeless. (Imagine a **Hunter** chronicle in which the characters are migrant workers, living hand to mouth while trying to eradicate the undead.)

This setting is good when you want to crank up **Hunter's** "righteous fury" elements. Here are people who have shitty schools, who suffer malign police neglect in their neighborhoods, and who have become handy political scapegoats because they don't have clout — all good reasons for monsters to prey on them, too.

Details to include:

• Mundane horrors. Slavering vampires aren't required for people to die in this milieu. Poor, old people die in the summer because their air conditioning is cut off. The homeless freeze to death in droves during winter. Maybe characters encounter a cop who *could* do something to improve his beat, but he just doesn't give a damn. And that's all without recourse to the nightmares of inner-city drug culture. (Check out *Clockers*, by Richard Price for a clear vision of a cocaine-driven underclass.)

• Dirt and clutter. Just as everything looks nice for the beautiful people, everything is dirty and broken for the underclass. Even new buildings and objects look cheap and shoddy — they just wait to fall apart.

• Sickness. Working and living in tight confines makes it easy for cold and flu bugs to spread. A persistent cough going around a neighborhood, factory or housing project can serve as an unspoken reminder of the social ills that spread just as invisibly.

The Lunatic Fringe. Who believes in werewolves and vampires? The same people who believe that the CIA tampered with their LSAT scores, because keeping them out of law school was a crucial step in the Roswell cover up.

A conspiracy atmosphere works particularly well with a paranoia tone. The former can also add an element of self-doubt to **Hunter**'s stew of outward-directed fear. If the characters can get help only from people who are obviously a few cans short of a case, the hunters' own sanity is called into question. Finding sympathy among crazies also raises the fear that these people are right about other things, as well.

Details of the lunatic fringe include:

• Bizarre connections. Conspiracy theories tend to be all-inclusive. Weather control, the Elders of Zion, the IRS, vampires, space aliens and (of course) JFK are all connected — all facets of one master plan.

• Poor social skills. Lunatics aren't eloquent. They speak intently, they use a lot of big words in the wrong places, and they don't bathe or brush their teeth quite as often as they should.

• Cluttered information. Books, blurred photographs, scratchy audio tapes and countless notebooks full of rambling notations are the earmarks of a good lunatic. There should always be a new weird thing just lying around whenever the characters visit.

The Secret World. While this atmosphere is superficially similar to the Lunatic Fringe, it has a great deal more immediate worth — the truth isn't out there, it's *right* here. You just have to be an "insider" to find out about it.

The scary part about the secret world is that it implies the characters have wasted their lives to this point — and that all their "normal" friends and loved ones are just dupes who don't really *matter*. The important people are the ones with power. Of course, **Hunter** at its core is already about the secret world, that of monsters. But imagine others in the same setting — circles within circles. Monsters? What about all the clones...?

Details that make a secret-world atmosphere work are:

• Passwords. Every subculture has slang. If the characters learn that the phrase, "You deserve a break today," is a signal meaning, "I'm ready to help vampires take over the world," it naturally makes them nervous to order a burger. The more common and innocuous the phrase, the better.

• Mysterious friends and mysterious enemies. Someone you don't know who tries to harm you is frightening. Someone you don't know who tries to *help* you (for unknown reasons) can be even more frightening.

• Hidden places. Conceal locations within locations. The outer, visible locale is as mundane as can be — a gas station, a split-level suburban ranch, a small business. Inside that location is a secret meeting place for Those Who Know. This approach is especially effective if you can establish the outer location as a bland feature of the characters' daily lives. ("Damn! I went to this laundromat for *years* and never suspected it had a basement — let alone *this* basement.")

Sample Setting Details

Animals. No matter what atmosphere or tone you're looking for, animals can be used in a variety of ways. They can imply character (someone who owns a savage, barking Doberman is likely to be very different from someone who spoils and coos over a purebred Abyssinian cat). Animals can also reveal a lot about a location. (What does it mean when no birds sing in the woods? What does it mean when an apartment is full of roaches and rats?)

Books, Records and Videotapes. The best way to get a glimpse into someone's mind is to check out what they

read and listen to. If someone has vintage *Tiger Beat* magazines lying atop a *Rock of the 80s* CD, you can make a few shrewd guesses about their tastes. On the other hand, someone with S&M porn in the VCR and death metal blaring out of the stereo probably embraces a different aesthetic.

Clothes Make the Monster. What people wear says a lot about them. Someone in cutoffs and a faded T-shirt may not have a big clothing budget — or maybe values comfort over appearance. A *haute couture* gown may cost the same amount of money as a conservative business suit, but it makes a distinct statement about the values of the wearer. The right clothing details can reveal culture, history and personality, without having to come right out and *say* it.

Plot

A story can have an elaborate, well-conceived setting and still be boring if the action is no good. The Storyteller system places a great deal of emphasis on a particular plot structure, called a chronicle. Whereas other games set up an unstructured series of events — the heroes go here, do this, then go there, do that, in an unconnected string of adventures — Storyteller games emphasize a definite beginning and end, with structure between to make the connection mean something.

To put it another way, many games are picaresque — like a sitcom, there are numerous episodes, but they're connected only by the characters and setting. There's very little "carry over" between events. Stories don't affect each other. The chronicle structure makes Storyteller games more like a movie, where every scene contributes to the overall movement of the story.

Planning Your Plot

Before the game begins, you need to have an idea of what your chronicle is about. To know *that*, you have to know the elements of plot. They are: premise, rising action, climax and falling action.

The premise is the basic idea of the plot: the starting point. It can be something simple: "Inner-city gangsters decide to kick the undead off their turf by using plenty of violence." Or more complicated: "Rock band decides to alert the world to the presence of the unliving."

Rising action is a series of conflicts and setbacks that prevent or delay the characters from accomplishing their goal. Maybe the undead fight back against the gangsters and wipe out most of their allies. Maybe the rock band loses its record contract because of undead interference. There are a lot of different ways in which characters can respond to the conflicts of rising action. As Storyteller, you have to be prepared to roll with the punches. You also need to have conflicts ready to impede the characters, no matter what they do.

The climax is when the situation comes to a head. This is the big confrontation, when the characters have a chance to make a permanent change to their situation (for good or for ill). A climax can simply be the granddaddy of all fight scenes, or it can be a more subtle internal conflict. For example, the gangsters might simply have to shoot their way through a housing complex full of zombielike servants in order to face the chief of the local undead. Then, they have a tremendous fight with him and either win (becoming the new local crime lords) or they lose (becoming worm food — or more likely, becoming loathsome servants of the undead). That's pretty cool — but imagine sticking some Luke Skywalker/ Darth Vader action in there, too.

The gangsters fight their way through the legions of underlings — but now, when they confront the chief of the undead, he offers them a deal:

"I'm impressed. I never dreamed that mere mortals could get so far. You have earned my respect." With a mocking smile, he applauds you. "You can try to destroy me now, if you wish — or you can join me. I can offer you not only wealth, but power. How would you like to dominate the minds of your fellows? How would you like the power to shrug off gunshots? How would you like... to live forever?"

Now the characters have a real quandary. They can stick to their guns, have a big, chancy fight, and *maybe* come out on top. Or they can throw in with their enemy and get a whole new world of troubles and opportunities. Either way, things can get very interesting.

That leads us to falling action — the aftermath of the climax. You can't (or shouldn't) force your players to choose only one option at the climax. (Nothing bothers players like being pushed around by the Storyteller. They might as well be watching TV if they have no real control of their characters' choices.) Once the choice has been made, it's your job to show the consequences of the decision. These can be good, bad or (most likely) mixed. Let's suppose the gangsters tell their low-rent Mephistopheles to go screw, and they manage to dust him after a tough fight. The repercussions could include:

- They're now crime kings of their neighborhood, with all the money and perks (and headaches) that implies.
- The police start cracking down on the gang because no one is using mind control to keep them back.
- Other undead creatures try to ally with the characters because they're obviously a force to contend with.
- One or more characters might have died in the final conflict. How do their families and friends react? How do the other *hunters* react?

Stories are tools for exploring ideas, and storytelling games are no different. Decide in advance what big question you want to ask your players through the story. Having that goal makes building plots much simpler. You can figure out how to get there, but only if you know where you're going.

Sample Plot Frameworks

I Want to Believe. The characters are primarily investigators. They don't understand the new world of mysterious power and fearsome unlife that they've entered, but they want to. Rather than exterminators, the hunters see themselves as explorers, trying to find the truth about these strange phenomena. Some climactic questions for this framework might be:

- When is the price of knowledge too high? What if learning the ultimate truth means allying with the forces you once fought?
- Once you understand, what do you do with your knowledge?
- What questions shouldn't be asked? What's too much information?

Here There Be Monsters. The hunters are less concerned with understanding and more concerned with bloody carnage. Like Eliot Ness and the Untouchables, they wage war, plain and simple. This is an action-oriented chronicle, but there's still room for tough moral decisions, such as:

- Victory with honor, or victory at any price? Are the hunters willing to accept "collateral damage" to mortals? What if it's the only way?
- Are they all really monsters? What happens if the hunters discover that some of the beings identified as "unnatural creatures" don't seem to be all that evil or dangerous? If they decide to fight a war of extermination, are they really any better than the worst of their prey? On the other hand, once you start making exceptions, where do you stop?
- What's the ultimate result of wiping out the enemy? What can be left for hunters after that?

Strange Bedfellows. Some hunters may soon learn (or intuit) that the supernatural isn't a united conspiracy against humanity. They may choose to side with one group or another in order to harm another, more dangerous faction. This option raises the following questions:

- Why would the unliving trust mortals? One side might use the hunters and then claim common cause with the other in order to discard the characters.
- What about other hunters? Some who've heard the Call are pretty militant about *any* alliances with unnatural beings. There's no enemy more dangerous than a traitor, after all. The characters may find themselves pursued by their fellow imbued.
- Who bells the cat? What if, once the struggle between the two undead factions is resolved, the hunters' "allies" are now in a position of tremendous strength? Do the hunters betray them (at great risk to themselves) or throw in with an enemy they once despised?

Running Your Plot

You have an overreaching plot framework for your chronicle. Now you can build individual, smaller conflicts into game sessions to provide variety while working toward the final climax. These subplots all have the same structure as the large plot, they're just on a smaller scale.

A "hook" replaces the premise step. This is just something that gets the hunters interested or involved in the event you have planned. You have to take care with the initial plot hook, though. If the hunters don't bite, they're likely to go off on some tangent of their own, and all the work you've invested into developing the story is wasted. Sometimes, tangents developed by players provide a great deal of interest, though.

The easiest ways to hook characters all come down to self-interest. You can hold out something they want, like information. ("In the dead creature's day planner, you find a notation for something called 'the Grand Sacrifice' right above a downtown address. It's scheduled five days from now....") You can also do this by threatening something the characters already have. ("You hear your wife's voice for only a moment before the creature's sickening rasp comes back on the phone. 'If you want to see her alive — or at least mobile — ever again, here's what you have to do....'")

Next comes the individual story's rising action: The hunters take various steps to secure a favorable outcome, and they face various antagonistic forces. If they succeed during the rising action, the climax is made easier. If they fail, the climax is more risky or requires greater sacrifice.

The climax of a subplot occurs when characters confront the source of the problem. Doing so should (one way or another) bring them closer to the climax of your overall chronicle plot. Even a failure in a subplot (the hunters do not prevent the Great Sacrifice, or the hunter's wife is killed) can steel their resolve to pursue the greater goal.

Finally, your subplots need to have consequences. Otherwise the players have little reason to care if their characters succeed or fail. If the hunters interrupt the Great Sacrifice, they should learn a little more about the big plans of the local undead. If the character's wife is rescued (or gets turned undead, for that matter), she should be in a position to explain some things to them.

Sample Plot Elements

Too Good to be True? The characters run across something that seems remarkably useful/ attractive/ good to them. It could be an eccentric millionaire who might possibly be persuaded to fund their harebrained schemes. It could be an abandoned church that somehow "feels right" to them. It could be a really nice woman who moves in next door and seems friendly. The question is: Can they trust appearances? After all, it could be a trap set by their devious supernatural enemies.

Damsel in Distress. A classic. This subplot is anything but subtle. Someone (not necessarily female, of course, but someone sympathetic and/or helpless) is seized by the enemy for unspeakable purposes and is held in a reputedly impregnable fortress. It's up to the hunters to go to the rescue.

The Prize. The hunters learn of some object of tremendous power/ influence/ value, and decide to steal/ find/ acquire it. Of course, they're not the only ones who have designs on the Maltese Falcon/ Ark of the Covenant/ Spear of Destiny. There are competitors willing to kill anyone who stands between them and the item.

Red Alert. Something big and dangerous rampages near the hunters' home, and they decide to nail it before it can find and destroy them one by one. The threat may be more than a match for all the hunters put together, meaning they have to get help or come up with some clever strategy to give them a decisive advantage.

Storyteller Characters

While the hunters are the protagonists or main characters of the story, they meet lots of other people (and sentient beings) in the course of the chronicle. One actor plays all these "supporting cast" members — you.

Portraying different characters is a critical skill for a Storyteller. A complicated plot can fail if your characters are all so similar that the players can't tell the difference between them — or don't care. Similarly, the best tone and atmosphere in the world won't make players care about the fate of boring characters. ("Why should I risk my life for them? They all suck!")

As Storyteller, you have a broader task than do the players when it comes to characterization. After all, each of them has only a single person to deal with — you have dozens. Their characters are "on-stage" all the time, though, whereas yours go through in rapid succession. Thus, while you need more characters, not all of them need to be developed fully. This isn't an excuse to get lazy, of course. But just as a few telling details can convey the impression of an entire room, a few words and gestures can tell the hunters all they need to know about a minor contributor.

Building Your Characters

When designing characters for your hunter group to meet, keep the setting and plot in mind. Every element — especially characters — should support those aspects of your chronicle. Ask yourself the following questions:

What is this character's function within the plot? A minor antagonist? A mysterious stranger with available information? An ally? A red herring?

How does this character fit in the tone and atmosphere of the setting? Is the character the embodiment of a certain facet of the tone? Or does she illuminate the atmosphere by contrast — being the *only* person who seems immune to the general feel of events?

These questions give you an idea of the character's purpose, and how to present her. Once you have these basics down, you can decide how much attention you need to spend on the character's personality. A gas-station attendant who saw a ghost? The hunters may speak to him only one time, so he doesn't need to have stats, Traits or a thoroughly realized motivation. A major ally or a prominent enemy? That's a different matter. Someone the characters are going to encounter again and again needs to have depth and complexity.

When building a prominent Storyteller character, start with Nature and Demeanor, just as if you were a player building a character. Put some thought into how the outward signs of the individual's personality depend on those two pillars. Figure out how the character pursues her goals (and what those goals are). Only when you know who the character is, what she's doing and *why*, should you worry about putting numbers to the beast.

Few people ever think, "I'm evil. I'm doing the wrong thing and I *love* it." The mustache-twirling villain is a stereotype that rarely occurs in reality. Worse, the black-hatted villain has been used so often that it's a cliché — more a joke than a menace. When people do bad things, they usually have some rationale behind it. "It was him or me." "It's for the greater good. I was just serving my country." "He was standing in the way of progress." "I lost control because *she* provoked me." Everyone wants to feel like a hero. The scariest people are often the ones who use the end to justify the means.

Granted, there are sadists and bullies and various psychopathic freaks out there — especially in the World of Darkness. They make good villains in the short term, but a steady diet of blood-lusting undead can become indigestible. Likewise, an endless array of devious schemers who weep and beg for mercy when they're finally confronted gets tiresome. And a set of honorable, pleasant, but utterly ruthless and misguided antagonists is repetitive. Change it up. Keep your players guessing, or they'll get bored. If every major combat opponent is a big bruiser in a leather jacket, there's nothing to make this week's episode different from last week's. By utilizing enemies with different tastes, methods and motivations, you can test *all* of the hunters' limits and abilities — not just their edges, social skills or combat abilities.

The numbers are really the *least* important part. Just try to keep your character balanced so he poses an appropriate challenge to the players' characters. Minor antagonists should be weaker than individual characters — dangerous if they have superior numbers or get really lucky, but not much of a threat one on one. More significant antagonists should match the characters — maybe not in the same areas, but should be of roughly equivalent power. Major chronicle-shaking enemies (should you need one) can face down a whole pack of hunters. But make sure there's a legitimate way for the hunters to win — it doesn't have to be easy or obvious or even *fair*, but it should exist.

Something to keep in mind about your stories: It isn't "you against them." It's not Storyteller versus players, and never should be, even though you control the antagonists. Your job isn't to ladle out crushing defeat. That's frustrating for players and boring for you. Your job is to set up a *challenge* — to create enough doubt and tension that victory means something when, and *if*, it is achieved.

Demonstrating Character

You demonstrate character with your voice, almost to the exclusion of everything else. If you have the skill to draw a picture of a Storyteller character, or the patience to find one that fits, that helps. But mostly it's the words you choose that bring your character to life. You accomplish this with dialogue and description.

Dialogue is when you speak in a character's voice — having an in-character conversation with the protagonists. This is a chance for your acting skills to shine. Change your tenor. If you usually have a clear, low voice, try speaking in a high, scratchy tone for one particular character. Use whispers, slang or accents if you think you can pull it off (even if you can't, there's always a place for comic relief). The human voice is a versatile instrument; don't be afraid to stretch your boundaries. (It's all in fun, right?) If you're shy or self-conscious, reserve unusual voices for minor characters. Doing so serves two purposes. You rarely use the voice you don't trust. And it makes that minor character more memorable and distinctive.

Description can also be used to demonstrate character, and all the tricks that apply to tone and atmosphere apply here, too. Explain what a character looks like. Tell how she acts. Detail how she dresses, what she drives, how people look at her, what she smells like. Just like describing a setting, find concrete details that stand for intangible qualities, and stress those details.

Portraying a character through description can play back into your atmosphere. Suppose a *femme fatale* interacts with one of your more libidinous hunters. The bland description, "she's a real hottie," doesn't do much. Here are two descriptions for a beautiful woman — from chronicles with radically different atmospheres.

Rachel is a lush, curvy redhead with skin like a ripe peach. She's wearing a clingy dress that matches her hair. It looks strained to its limits, waiting for her to spill out of it like a harvest pouring out of a cornucopia. She's licking an ice cream cone, and her plum lips smile as you walk into view.

You're waiting at the corner when Beth steps out of the fog. Her long jacket is trimmed with fur, and tight black gloves grip every inch of her long, delicate fingers. Above the dark fur, her smooth, pale skin seems to glow like moonlight. Her mouth is narrow but heavy, and it always seems pursed in tentative apprehension. Mostly though, you notice her eyes. Big, dark, deep, they always seem poised to spill a tear.

Don't forget your inflections when you speak about a character. You'd be surprised how much a description of a seemingly nice, wholesome person can be undermined by an ironic or threatening tone of voice.

A final tool to remember for establishing identity is your body. Change posture to reflect the character you portray. If he's a tiny person, hunch up. If he's big and brash, stand tall and look down on your players. Someone who's hesitant and nervous might perpetually pull at her lower lip. Facial expressions can speak volumes, and a well-timed facial tic can add a whole new layer of meaning to what a character says.

Sample Character Qualities

Energy Level. Is the character blasé and relaxed, no matter what happens, or is she always jumpy, energetic and fidgety? Someone who's usually wide-awake and intent, but is now quiet and still, can be remarkably spooky.

Attitude Toward Others. Does this person act superior and snobby? Friendly and welcoming? Formal and polite?

Habits. Is the character always filing her nails? Brushing hair back from her forehead? Smacking her lips or grinning nervously? Buying lottery tickets and cursing when she loses?

Bit Characters. Not all people and monsters whom the characters face should be powerful, magic-wielding forces of nature. Not all of them should get character sheets or even statistic profiles. If a Storyteller character has a minor role, especially in combat against the hunters, let him be a throw-away character — a minor opponent whom the protagonists dispense with quickly. Chapter 7 details "streamlined" health levels (p. 202) for short-term opponents. Use these types of characters when you want a horde of henchmen or zombies to intercept or deter the hunters, but not stop them cold or kill them outright. Such "bit characters" therefore play their role by presenting obstacles and creating drama, but they don't slow down your main narrative. Wait till the players' characters face their primary enemies before you pull out all Trait, power and health level stops.

The Particulars of Storytelling Games

So far, this section has dealt with the "story" elements of storytelling games. Now it's time to address the "game" aspect — the part that makes this form of storytelling unique.

Cooperative Effort

When a novelist sits down to churn out a book, the characters don't rebel. James Cameron didn't have to worry that the protagonist of *Titanic* might shrug, grunt and say, "Let the rich ho take care of herself for once!" A Storyteller, on the other hand, has to accept the free will of the players in her game. Without that element, the whole exercise becomes one of manipulation and frustration.

You're the Storyteller. You have tremendous power to interpret the rules, to generate and modify the background, to introduce events and to adjudicate them as they occur. You run things. But deep within the heart of each player is a little voice that says, "You ain't the boss of me." And that voice is *right*. Everything you do, you should do to challenge, intrigue, fascinate and *entertain* your players. Never forget that you do it all for them.

Along with your authority, you're responsible to the players. You owe them challenges, invention and fairness. Now, "fairness" doesn't mean that every fight should be a fair one. Hell, no! It means you should stick to the premise of your game, that you should be fair to the setting as you've defined it. If the players screw up in some ghastly, stupid fashion, it's only *fair* for you to school them hard for it. If you let them off the hook, you don't do them any favors. You're making the game less challenging and less fun in the long run. Similarly, if the players do something brilliant and tidily sidestep one of your challenges, you *owe* them a reward. Failing to recognize inventiveness, cleverness and staying in character is just as much a violation of the setting as giving players breaks or setting up low hurdles.

In the final analysis, that's what cooperative effort means. You provide a setting, plot and a series of challenges. They provide interesting characters, and *they* decide how to navigate your challenges. Maybe they make bad decisions and call vast trouble onto their own heads. That's fine. Maybe they succeed, gain tremendous advantages, and then abuse them in some disgusting or infuriating fashion. You may not like it, but you have to respect *their choice*.

And Now, a Word on Cheating

At some point you may run into a situation like this: The hunters head toward the lair of some funk-ugly king monster. One of its brainwashed servants lies in wait with a 12-gauge. One of your best players has his character lead the way. He's playing right, not taking any stupid chances, but the player blows an easy Perception roll — the goon with the gun gets the drop on him. Usually no problem, but that player also manages to screw up his initiative roll. Still not too bad (you think); maybe the outclassed goon softens him up before the hunter creams him. Then you roll the shotgun damage and it's *all 10s*. Yikes! But the hunter has a high Stamina. He'll surely soak some of those — but no.

A series of weird die rolls has just wiped out a good character. That's bad. But what feels *intolerable* is that the character has died for no good reason.

There's two ways you can handle such a scenario: strict or loose. The strict way is to let the dice fall where they may. Hey, hunting the unknown is dangerous stuff, and people die from stupid, meaningless accidents every day. If the other characters pull him out of the fire with some fancy Defender or Martyr stuff, maybe they can bring him through it, but the rules are the rules and the players knew the risks going in.

The loose way is to let the other players think the character is dead. Let the *player* think his character is dead, too. Run the rest of the session, possibly with that player taking the role of an ally or bystander so that he still gets some action. Then, right before everyone leaves, take the player aside and say something like:

You wake up in terrible, terrible pain. The last thing you remember is the smell of gun smoke, a crashing noise and a bright light. Your eyes open wide. Looming over you is the hideous face of the vampire Hovorka. He giggles, leans in and whispers, "Your friends left you for dead, but I knew better. You're going to be my toy. Understand? And it's gonna be forever!"

On one hand, you've spared the character the ignominy of a pointless death at the hands of a minor opponent. That's mercy. On the other hand, none of the other hunters know the character is alive, and now he's the enslaved servant of a psycho vampire. So no one can really argue that you took it easy on him.

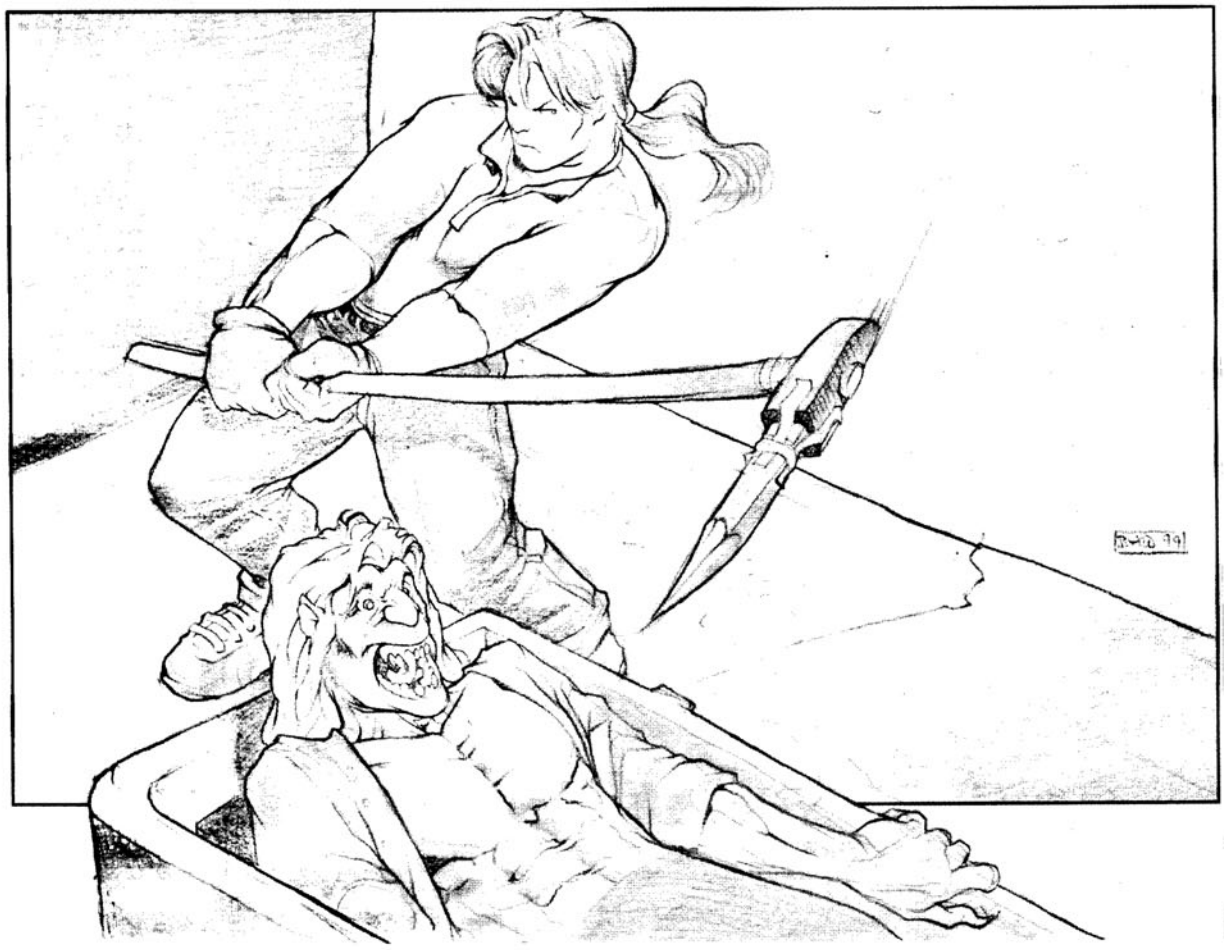
You "cheated," but you've been fair to the player and fair to the setting. Most importantly, you've created a *challenge* — one that can push your plot forward, instead of halting it.

The Unexpected

At some point, players make decisions you haven't anticipated. It could be a big thing or a little thing. It could be a decision that helps them, or one that puts them in unnecessary danger. It could be something that doesn't really change things, or it could threaten to derail your plot completely.

There's a strong impulse to punish players when they "go rogue," but resist that urge. If you do your job right, they have no way of knowing what's coming. It's hardly fair to blame them for messing up a future they aren't even supposed to suspect. You have to suck it up.

If you're good, you can wing it and think up stuff on the fly. Your players may not even suspect that they run into things you never planned. Still, don't be afraid to declare a little pause and wander off to the bathroom for a meditation break. You may find that taking a deep breath and asking yourself, "What's the logical result of this?" does the trick. If not, stall them until the end of the game session and think about it at leisure until you get a solid idea.



Most unexpected derailments are minor, but if you run into something major, or if they become more and more frequent, you may want to take a step back and consider the structure of your chronicle. For instance, suppose you envisioned an epic of scheming and plotting and subtle maneuvers, but your players consistently choose the "grab the guns and kick ass" option.

Maybe you should give them what they want — not in the sense of providing paper tigers and meaningless victories, but by giving them the challenges they want to explore. Of course, this doesn't mean changing horses mid-race, unless your current horse is dead. A radically changed chronicle is better than one that gets scrapped — as long as you change it to provide more fun for your players.

The Ten Commandments

- **Involve Players Whenever Possible:** Incorporate their ideas and backgrounds into your city and chronicle. Doing so interests them *immediately*, gives them a voice in your story, and can go a long way toward forestalling unpleasant surprises. The players' characters should be the most important — though not necessarily the most powerful — ones in your chronicle. It's well worth your time to work with players to develop their characters, even between game sessions.

- **Be Aware of Players' Expectations:** Giving players the general kind of challenge they want is a good thing. On the other hand, being predictable is not. If the characters think vampires are sleek, powerful predators, you can change it up on them by presenting a neonate vampire who's psychologically codependent on his living girlfriend. Or introduce a vampire with little brainpower and impulse control, but lots of wicked powers. Or something that looks like a vampire but is a creature of a different nature entirely.

- **Work Things out in Advance:** Every erg of effort you spend preparing saves you 10 ergs of desperation during the actual game. If you know in advance what's in a place, or what motivates an important character, then you pay more attention to *describing* what you know instead of making things up on the spot.

- **Story First, Rules Second:** Rules are tools. Use them, but don't let them trap you. If you make the odd change here or there to encourage the flow of the story, no one will notice — or at least care.

- **Description, Dialogue and Action:** Intense, well-imagined description creates a sense of immediacy. It makes people pay attention to the story. Interesting, consistent, frequent action *keeps* them interested. Hook them by making it feel real. Reel them in by making them want to know how it turns out.

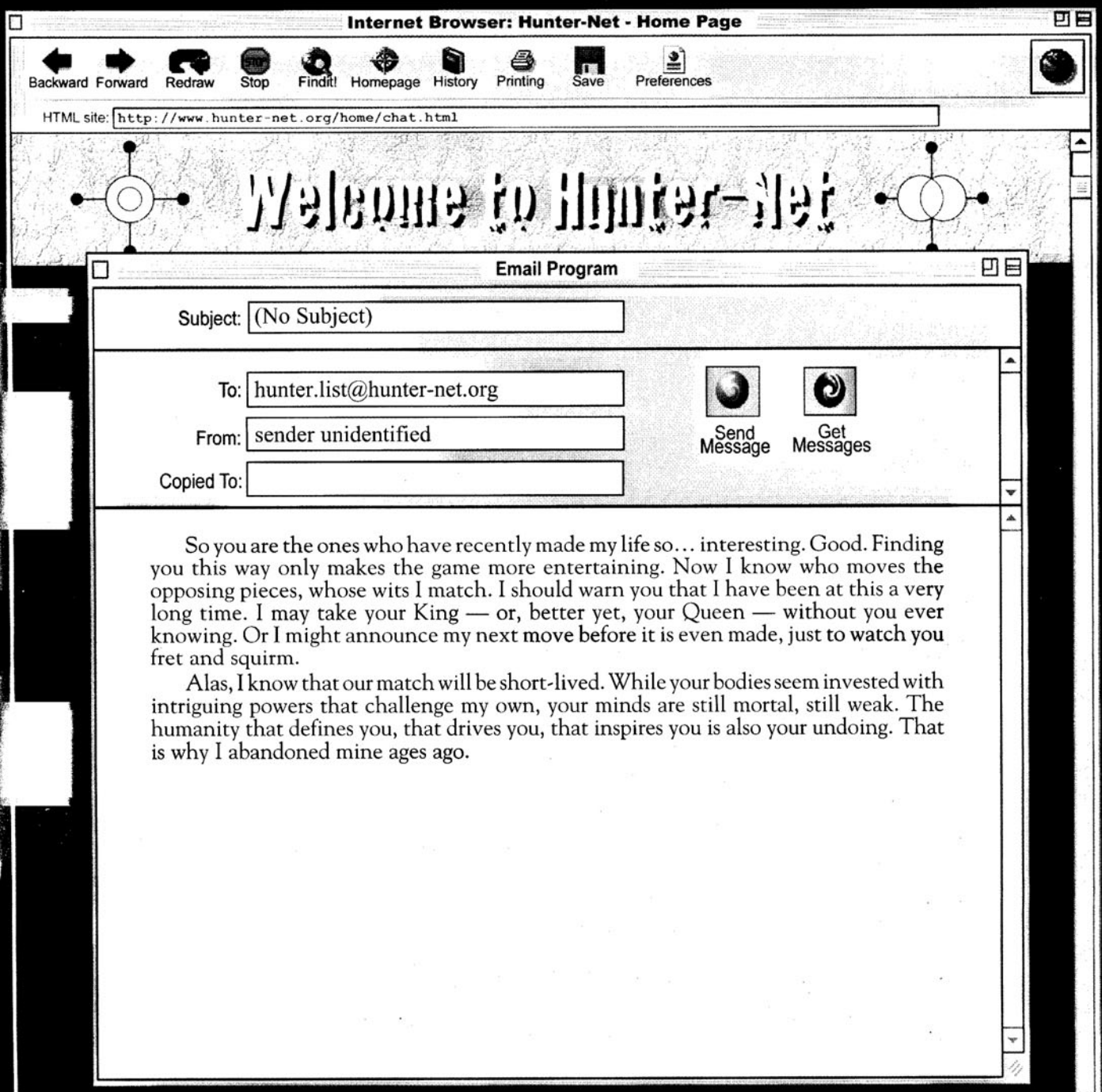
- **Avoid Stereotypes:** Perfect examples of type are rare. People who *try* to fit into a stereotype usually do so to cover up some secret insecurity, and (on close inspection) may not be able to carry it off. People who naturally tend toward being stereotypes often rebel against being just like everyone else, and may go to great lengths to show that they're unique.

- **Be Fair to Your Setting:** If the players work hard and make smart decisions, their characters' success must be in proportion to the challenges faced, or the players will feel cheated. Conversely, don't reward characters if they don't earn it or the reward will be hollow.

- **Don't Tell Them Everything:** Much of the challenge of a game is in the mystery, the parts of the story that you hold back for the players and their characters to discover on their own.

- **Don't Abuse Your Power:** Remember that you're there to provide entertainment for the players, as well as for yourself. Respect your control over their characters. You both initiate and arbitrate events. Use your power to prolong the story, not to force your friends to play out *your* vision of how their characters should act.

- **Don't Panic:** If the players pull the rug out from under you, don't be afraid to call a break and take some time to collect your thoughts. It may happen a lot at first, but after a while you will be able to handle anything they throw at you.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Get Messages
So you are the ones who have recently made my life so... interesting. Good. Finding you this way only makes the game more entertaining. Now I know who moves the opposing pieces, whose wits I match. I should warn you that I have been at this a very long time. I may take your King — or, better yet, your Queen — without you ever knowing. Or I might announce my next move before it is even made, just to watch you fret and squirm.
Alas, I know that our match will be short-lived. While your bodies seem invested with intriguing powers that challenge my own, your minds are still mortal, still weak. The humanity that defines you, that drives you, that inspires you is also your undoing. That is why I abandoned mine ages ago.

CHAPTER 9: THE ENEMY (ANTAGONISTS)

They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood.
— Psalms 94:21

tick tock tick tock
dong dong dong
click clack click click
drip... drip... drip

My life is currently defined by repetitious sounds. There's the grandfather clock actually given to me by my grandfather. And my computer keyboard. Most importantly, most notably, there's my IV drip. These sounds are the extent of my life, and they have been for a couple months, ever since a confused and betrayed creature slashed off my legs.

This essay, this work in progress, is hotlinked under my hunter handle, Bookworm55. That's extraneous information to provide here in the body of the text, but I want to emphasize it because it means I was part of the first hunter-net. In case you didn't know, everybody with a handle below 124 was on the original site.

I was already in the hospital when all that weird stuff happened with the first site. I'm still a little unclear about what happened and what it all means, but when I reconnected to the web two weeks ago and somehow found this site again, Witness1 asked me to share my expertise with all the newcomers. (I'm still not sure how I found the original site again, since any search engines I used reported nothing even remotely connected with us real hunters. But here's hunter-net, back again. I'm just glad it's been restored, and I don't want to ask too many questions how.)

If you are new to this site, if you have been imbued only recently, then you don't know that I always have a lot to say on the subject of the beings we face. On the basis of my posts to the first site, Witness1 asked me to collect my information and expound upon it.

Bookworm55's Caveats

This pseudo-essay is all about sharing information, but first some conditions.

1. I don't consider myself one to be doling out advice. I'm a college kid, a poor college kid at a big-city university. Contrary to how courageous I might *sound* in some of my following stories, I don't really know much about this world. I've never traveled outside my home town. I've never had sex. I've never tried drugs or alcohol. I've never even driven a car. You get the picture. You're probably laughing at me, but that's okay. It means you still have some feelings left after all you've been through.

2. Despite all the information I've collected, I nearly got killed. Don't rely completely on what I say. I'm not deceiving you on purpose, but I have a feeling there's a whole lot more to what's going on than I've been able to piece together in a few months.

3. Don't use this information as a "how to kill" manual. First of all, I know little about killing (though I have killed, so stop laughing at my virginity). More importantly, I gained most of this information through serious civilized conversations with the monsters many of you thoughtlessly destroy. Sure, plenty of them are rapacious beasts that gorge themselves on the defenseless. But when you drop one from a hundred meters with a rifle outfitted with a laser sight and special bullets, you're just as cruel as it is.

4. This is a work-in-progress. I'm researching on a lot of summary information that I'll add later. You're welcome to make your own additions, though understand that Witness1 has allotted me some control over responses and I will delete anything I consider misleading or unverified.

If my posts suddenly stop someday, don't mourn for me. I'll be dead by my own hand. The "vampire" who believes I betrayed her may seek me out to finish what she started. I'm ready. I won't become another monster that you'll have to strike down. I have a syringe hidden within reach that I can use to inject myself. My research says only a couple drops of the contents are required. Killing myself may be the only courageous thing I'll ever do.

5. Finally, I believe in monsters and always have. If you grew up where I did (no, I'm not looking for sympathy for my past or my missing legs), then you would, too. You wouldn't doubt for a moment any of the information that slowly comes to light for us. Namely, that monsters are everywhere and seem to be behind a lot of things we ordinary people take for granted. Nor does it surprise me that some of the "monsters" are far better people (or *were* far better people) than many humans.

The bottom line is, I believe everything I say here. I believe there are monsters who survive by drinking blood and eating human flesh. I believe that ghosts can be responsible for the weird noises in some houses. I don't ask you to take all this on faith, but I wouldn't disabuse you of your wild ideas. The more far-fetched the idea, the more likely it's true. At least, that's what I've found.

Monster Profiles

This chapter contains a number of sidebars that detail monster Traits and powers for use by the Storyteller. Players may read the body of this chapter, but are advised to avoid the sidebars for fear of learning too much about the enemy; only the Storyteller should know how the walking dead and nightstalkers operate in the game.

Profile sidebars provide very basic mechanics for depicting creatures. There's certainly enough here to tell entertaining stories. However, if you're already familiar with the other games in the Storyteller series, substitute "official" monsters' powers and capabilities for those presented here. The **Hunter Storytellers Companion** interprets the other games' rules that govern monsters, and lets you portray those beings in more detail than presented here, without having to possess anything but **Hunter** and its supplemental books.

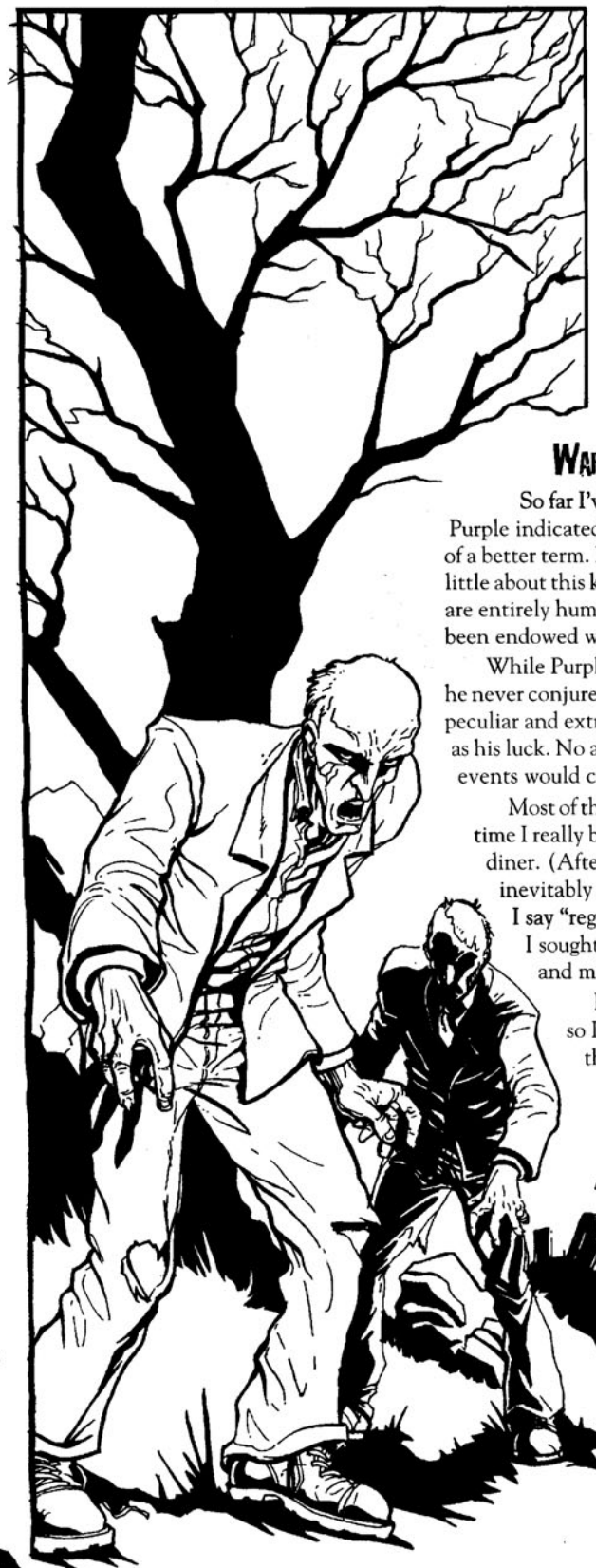
For the purposes of this rulebook, Willpower is the energy source used to fuel most monsters' powers. Each profile explains how. Creatures' Willpower scores are therefore inflated artificially.

My Methods

Most of the information herein is gathered from personal experience, mainly through interviews with an individual I refer to as Purple, a man who claims to be a warlock. I have confirmed his claim by spying on other warlocks, who seem to have "auras" of the same color (a perception ability that I and some other imbued seem to possess). "Interview" is perhaps an inappropriate term to use; Purple was usually unresponsive to direct questions. Instead, he would answer only gradually, and vaguely.

I told Purple that I would never reveal him as my source, so I will withhold any details concerning him. It's largely moot, I suspect, as he finally disappeared after nine sessions at the diner where I found him. Whether my promises mean anything to him, or whether he even recalls speaking to me is doubtful. He made periodic and elliptical references to what in hindsight I believe to be a temporary madness. Nevertheless, the information I gleaned from our meetings always bore out when the facts could be double-checked.

I also use anecdotal evidence here to fill in information gaps that I cannot cover personally. These are stories I recall from the original hunter-net, or actually copied into text files and repaste herein. If you are the source of any of these anecdotes and you note errors in transcription or memory, please alert me and I will make the appropriate corrections.



Roll Call

Ghosts, zombies, vampires, werewolves, goblins and other monsters not yet featured in a dozen Hollywood movies all exist. Beyond these supernatural beings, there are humans other than hunters who possess their own fantastic abilities. From whence their powers came or come, I do not know, but these people are real. My purpose here is to examine the basics of some of these seeming categories of beings.

Since a large portion of my information comes by way of Purple, I feel it's necessary to begin my discussion with warlocks. I also describe beings in order of how human they appear, so the sections range from witches to werewolves.

Warlocks

So far I've seen only men, like my informant, possess a purple aura, but Purple indicated that women also possess what I call magical powers, for lack of a better term. Despite the fact that Purple himself was a warlock, I know very little about this kind of being. (I refer to them as "beings" for I do not think they are entirely human, at least in the sense that we hunters are humans who have been endowed with a mission and abilities by some outside source.)

While Purple himself never exhibited any obvious supernatural powers — he never conjured demons or fired lightning from his fingertips — he was a most peculiar and extraordinary individual. Most notable was what I came to define as his luck. No accidents ever seemed to befall him, and sometimes outrageous events would conspire to bring about entirely beneficial ends.

Most of the time Purple's luck amounted to simple things, such as the first time I really became aware of him. We were sitting in adjacent booths in the diner. (Afterward, that's where I was always able to find him. He would inevitably enter moments after I did once our association became regular. I say "regular" loosely, because there was really no pattern to the times I sought him out, especially once I recognized his timely appearances and made certain my visits were unpredictable).

Let me explain that this first encounter was before my imbuing, so I had no idea at the time that this incident was anything other than a weird coincidence. It wasn't until some time later that I gained my "aura sight," as I call it, and determined that Purple was indeed more than strictly human.

Anyway, I was vaguely aware of Purple while I ate my own breakfast. He was an odd fellow, kind of eccentric like you'd expect of Albert Einstein, with tousled hair and everything. The waitress brought his check when he was done eating. That's when I really watched him closely. When she walked away, I saw him turn all his pockets inside out and turn up only a couple of coins. He sort of shrugged and looked around, and he caught me looking at him. He gave me a huge, friendly smile, but seemed to look right through me.

Then he asked for another cup of coffee

and just sat there sipping it for a while. I was curious what was going to happen, so I sipped slowly, too. After a while, the waitress started to eye us both. I supposed we were clogging her traffic and ruining her tips. Then the weirdest thing happened. A group of construction workers got up from a table and walked past Purple and I. The first guy was reaching for his wallet and opened it as he passed. Plain as day, a $20 bill fell to the floor near Purple. The next guy noticed it and picked it up. Instead of giving it to his pal, he looked at Purple and said something like, "Hey, buddy, I think you dropped this." Purple took the $20 and paid right after the construction workers. When I got up to pay a minute later, the cashier said Purple had paid for me, too!

You're probably thinking it was no big deal — a coincidence. Maybe it was kind of stupid, but weird things like that always happened to Purple. Like when he was being mugged by two guys outside the diner. One went to stab Purple but stumbled and fell into the other mugger and gutted him, instead! Or when Purple was crossing the street and some early morning drunk came speeding around a corner with no way to miss hitting him — and the warlock fell through an open manhole.

If you think such anecdotal evidence isn't enough, then imagine such long shot turns of events happening just as you predict. Or at least in the spirit of how it's predicted. A while into our talks, a rude lady eating by herself insisted on taking the last open booth and forced us to the counter. After we were sitting, Purple got an ugly look on his face as he watched the woman brush her hair. "Maybe she should wash that again," I heard him mutter. A moment later, a passing busboy and customer collided and a bowl of soup slopped onto the woman. Startled, I turned to Purple and asked if he'd been the cause. "Doesn't look like it, does it," was his only answer.

Not all warlocks are as nonthreatening, though, and there's good reason to consider them among our "opposition." Purple constantly referred to a "they" and "them" whom he obviously found threatening and dangerous. The last time I saw Purple, I surmised that these enemies were getting close to him, but whether he disappeared because he needed to escape them or he was captured, I may never know.

Based on my conversation with Purple, I've drawn the following conclusions about witches and warlocks.

They are divided into factions of varying philosophies, though which might help hunters and which oppose us, I cannot be sure. Nor was I ever given any exact names if any indeed exist.

They possess uncanny luck, which appears to be the majority of the magic they wield. Such discreet powers explain how their magic remains undetected.

However, they can also control the environment in overtly supernatural ways. I once witnessed a group of warlocks acting in concert atop several of the buildings downtown. I was watching from the roof of another building at Purple's suggestion and witnessed an awesome pyrotechnic display. It was storming and a bolt of lightning forked through the sky. Instead of hitting a lightning rod, it struck the outstretched hand of a warlock. He seemed to gather the energy before hurling it toward a warlock on a distant rooftop. Electricity crackled between the two. After a half dozen more strikes, the central warlock was connected to seven beings located throughout the downtown area. I might have seen more, but I unwisely used my aura sight to confirm the nature of the beings. It was only the third time I had used the ability (the first was on Purple, the second during a false alarm), and I didn't understand that it drew attention to me. I ran.

I knew I was in trouble; the sorcerer conducting the "ritual" had looked right at me — across the street. Yet I survived, even given the power that I saw being thrown around. It was then that I had a sense that everything would work out, almost as if someone were watching over me, protecting me. I don't know who or what — the Messengers? Maybe it was my colleague who later played his hand and inadvertently cost me my legs. I'll explain it all shortly.

Witch and Warlock Profile

Warlocks and witches appear to be normal humans. Second sight indicates them as inhuman in some way, but it takes edges such as Illuminate, Witness or Discern to understand how. Warlocks' Attributes and Abilities vary as much as they do among humans, but they tend to have high Mental Traits. Warlocks control their environment through force of will, so it's not unusual for one to have 20 Willpower. Powerful ones might have an even higher rating.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: (choose from) Academics 4, Alertness 3, Awareness 3, Dodge 2, Expression 4, Linguistics 5, Medicine 3, Occult 4, Science 2

Willpower: 15+

Powers: Warlocks and witches have a power called Luck. They may spend a number of Willpower points equal to their Wits every turn in order to alter events to their favor. Astounding coincidences, miraculous escapes and unbelievable misfortunes for enemies all appear to work to the warlock's benefit. Luck is an excuse for the Storyteller to dream up a freakish string of events that comes to a witch's aid. Willpower spent on Luck is recovered at the rate of one point per hour, or potentially faster if a warlock is in his home and he meditates properly.

Anyway, warlocks are revealed by my particular sight ability, and that of a few other hunters, I understand. That means witches and their kind are not human and are presumably part of our mission, though the fine point of how to respond to them is probably best left to the discerning and thoughtful among us.

Vampires

From posts on the original hunter-net, I know many of you believe that applying labels like "vampire" or "zombie" to various kinds of walking dead is ridiculous. It's "Hollywood-inspired obsession," "pure foolishness" or the result of "runaway imaginations."

But that's not true. There *are* vampires, or at least there are animated corpses that share enough characteristics with the vampires of western folklore to invite use of the name. Maybe vampires like Dracula — European nobles acting with good grace and discretion — were the rule in the Old World. But in the early 21st century, vampires seem largely to be thugs with little to distinguish them from human counterparts in gangs and organized crime.

Maybe it's just a reflection of what our world is coming to that even the supernatural appears to be obviously flawed and in need of guidance. Maybe the only vampires we've encountered so far are the dumb ones, while the masters hide away in mansions surrounding Central Park, or dwell on the top floors of the Sears Tower.

Whatever the case, these beings are extremely powerful and dangerous, so I recommend extreme caution if you identify one. This doesn't mean liquidate it from long range. That might not do the trick, even if a sniper takes a shot. I also hasten to note that vampires are little different from *us*. We are humans who have been chosen. They are humans who have been "kissed." That's what they call it, or at least that's how Purple referred to the process. This means they are no more or less willing to live the life thrust upon them than you or I happen to be. However, humans being humans, give one supernatural powers, a long life and a desire to drink blood, and you've probably got a problem. But just as rehabilitation is a better option than the electric chair, perhaps less gunplay and more conversation is the way to deal with these beings.

A fine example is the vampire who took my legs. I'd gathered a lot of second-hand information about vampires from Purple and other sources, but I'd never actually spoken to one. I carried out two successful interviews with a particular vampire (she insisted we exchange blood before she would answer any questions, a fact that, while dangerous, did glean some information for me). That was before an overzealous colleague got involved. The poor man is dead now, but he tailed me one evening to a rendezvous with my contact. (Because of my feelings for this sad woman, I won't share any information about her. I know there are some among you who would use my clues to hunt her down.)

Anyway, shortly before our usual exchange of blood, the hunter who followed me ambushed us. I think he meant to kill us both, because he seemed to consider me a beast now, too. In the end, he didn't kill anybody. The woman, a petite and pretty thing (although the "pretty" doesn't really factor into it, I suppose), dismembered the man savagely. I admit I was shocked to see her unleash like that, especially since she seemed so cultivated when I spoke to her (at least, compared to the thuggish vampires I'd spied on previously).

I tried to run while they fought. In the flash of an eye, she covered the distance that had taken me several seconds to sprint. I remembering being thrown against the alley wall, but nothing more. The police report said I was found crawling out of the alley. I can only guess I was left for dead, if you can call *this* living.

I have some other posts regarding vampires copied from the original hunter site, items which I append here. I post them in italics to separate them from my own statements, because I can't personally guarantee their information.

I wasn't asking for trouble, I was just doing what I had to. They were zombies and I did a number on them. They were the sort I call shamblers: sort of slow, but they seemed to have a purpose. Three of them walked past several easy enough targets and made their way to a house in Cabbagetown. They were so set on what they were doing that I took the first two out before the last knew I was there. He put up a fight, but I got him in the end.

So, after I... disposed of the remains... I went to a local bar, a filthy place, but good for cooling down without attracting attention. I was sitting there drinking when this Italian guy comes over, sits down and stares at me. He looks like an extra out of The Godfather, *but he's dead. I mean, you can tell after a while, and this guy was dead.*

I was frantically trying to think of how to get him outside and waste him when I realized I couldn't move a muscle. I couldn't even speak. He started talking to me about staying away from his servants, not interfering in his plans, and I'm doing everything I can just to try to wiggle a finger.

He opened his mouth and smiled at me, showing me a set of teeth that would scare Cujo, and asks me if I understand him. Without my meaning it to happen, my head starts nodding like I'm saying, "yes." He made a couple of threats. The kind of "If you ever mess with me again, I'm gonna feed you to the fishes" sort of shit you expect from a guinea. Then his cell phone rings and he answers, and all the while I keep nodding. It's all I can do. He got up and left, and it was like no one in there even saw him. They were all doing their own thing, ignoring us completely.

I have not witnessed vampires exhibit any sort of supernatural powers beyond the physical, such as amazing strength or speed, but stories like this are not one-of-a-kind. In addition, all the vampires I've watched seem to have a potent sort of animal magnetism. Perhaps this is an evolutionary advantage used to lure humans into traps. I once saw

a biker draw every woman around him to his side, which makes me wonder if I didn't see something similar to the mind control discussed above.

Finally, I have this snippet that I clipped from the old site. I suspect there was more to the account than this, but I took the part that was of interest.

I didn't know what it was, but I had suspicions. I mean, if ghosts and zombies are real, why not vampires? I don't think it was used to being in the city. Maybe it was just confused, rotting away like a zombie but only on the inside. I don't like to just attack a deader for being a deader, so I waited to see what it would do. I didn't have to wait too long before it found a bum and went for his throat. I know my legends as well as the next guy. I found a broom in the dumpster, broke off the handle, and went for the heart. I guess I must have missed. It turned and looked at me and growled like a pissed-off dog.

I pulled the stick out to try again and *it* changed — *turned into smoke or something and disappeared.*

Here are some facts regarding vampires that I have assembled.

1. They cannot stand sunlight and are nocturnal. Other bright lights seem to have no affect on them.

2. They need to drink blood to survive. They cannot stomach any other food or drink, which means even if you lack the capacity to recognize some creatures, careful attention might help you note the one person in a rowdy group who never touches the food or beer in front of him. That, or the level of his glass never drops.

Only human blood seems to actually satisfy these creatures. I've seen a vampire drink from a squealing rat, but it appeared to provide no satisfaction — she still demanded some of my blood as payment for answering questions.

Vampire feeding creates quite a moral conundrum. If vampires are a higher order of human, at least if you regard such matters as evolutionary in regard to the food chain, then how is a blood-drinking vampire any different than a beef-eating human?

3. Religious artifacts appear to offer no deterrence whatsoever. If you have faith, then carry it with you because you'll need its strength, but don't expect it to offer an advantage over vampires.

4. I'll let you know about garlic. It lines all the entries to my apartment — or it did when I was last there.

5. Hurting these beings seems incredibly difficult. Bullets seem to have little effect. The same goes for knives and clubs, short of decapitation or amputation, that is. (Most people don't have the kind of strength that must be required to take off a limb — meanwhile, such strength was certainly used against me.) However, fire seems to be a weakness. Perhaps dead tissue can withstand blunt trauma but not being burned.

6. Vampires bleed and actually retain blood in their systems. I don't think the blood circulates — my contact didn't have a pulse — but she bled when she cut her finger.

I'm told that vampire blood in a human does something to the person: It makes him stronger and tougher. And yet, no such effects seemed to occur with me. Maybe being touched like we are makes us immune to becoming vampires or their agents. And yet, that leaves so many normal people vulnerable.

Vampire Profile

The following is an example of a young vampire, perhaps newly turned.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: (choose from) Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Computer 2, Dodge 3, Drive 2, Etiquette 3, Finance 2, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Leadership 2, Medicine 2, Melee 4, Occult 3, Politics 1, Security 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 4, Survival 4

Willpower: 8

The following represents a strong vampire, one that has been around for a while.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 6

Abilities: (choose from) Academics 3, Alertness 4, Animal Ken 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Computer 1, Crafts 2, Dodge 5, Empathy 3, Etiquette 4, Expression 4, Finance 4, Firearms 4, Intimidation 5, Investigation 4, Law 4, Leadership 3, Linguistics 3, Medicine 4, Melee 5, Occult 4, Politics 4, Science 3, Security 4, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 5, Survival 5

Willpower: 10

The following is an example of a very powerful vampire, one that has existed for decades or centuries.

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 7, Stamina 7, Charisma 5, Manipulation 7, Appearance 5, Perception 6, Intelligence 6, Wits 7

Abilities: (choose from) Academics 7, Alertness 7, Animal Ken 5, Athletics 6, Awareness 5, Brawl 5, Dodge 5, Empathy 1, Etiquette 5, Expression 4, Finance 7, Firearms 3, Intimidation 7, Investigation 4, Law 4, Leadership 7, Linguistics 5, Medicine 5, Melee 6, Occult 5, Politics 7, Science 3, Security 5, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 7, Survival 7

Willpower: 15

Weaknesses

All vampires suffer one health level of lethal damage per turn of exposure to sunlight. This damage cannot be soaked. Fire causes vampires lethal damage and cannot be soaked. A vampire that is staked through the heart is paralyzed. The attack has a difficulty of 9, and three health levels' damage must be inflicted for the attack to succeed. A staked vampire cannot move physically, but it can use any of its mental powers.

Vampiric Powers

Vampires have powers of their own, just as the imbued have special capabilities. Vampire powers differ based on the individual; many are almost human in their abilities, whereas some are extremely powerful (the former are far more common, while the latter are only rarely encountered by hunters). The following are only samples of the powers that vampires can possess. The Storyteller is encouraged to design new ones.

Newly created vampires are likely to have three powers, none of them beyond a fairly low level. Strong vampires have four to five powers with weak to moderate levels. Ancient vampires have five to six powers, each at moderate to potent levels.

A vampire must expend Willpower to use any of its powers. Willpower is regained at the rate of one point for every turn spent drinking human blood, subject to a maximum of 10 points of blood from any one person (and the victim is dead after eight are taken). Additionally, a vampire loses one Willpower every night that it does not feed; determined hunters could conceivably lay siege to a trapped vampire.

Invisibility: This power is not exactly what the name implies. Vampires with this capability can cause themselves to look like someone else to anyone around them, or they can simply make everyone in an area ignore them as if they weren't there. They cannot truly disappear, however. This power does not hide their presence from cameras or other electronic detection devices, it merely affects the minds of people in the vampire's vicinity. A Willpower point is spent to use an invisibility power for a scene.

Hunters who have activated second sight (i.e., spent a point of Conviction for the scene) are immune to vampires' invisibility power. The Discern, Witness and Illuminate edges can also reveal vampire presence or true appearance. Those imbued without active second sight or appropriate edges are treated as normal people for detecting bloodsuckers (most simply don't see; some truly alert might get a Perception roll, difficulty 8).

Weak vampires can hide themselves in a crowd or in shadows with relative ease. Strong vampires can alter the way they appear to others, and powerful vampires can do either of these things to themselves and to several others at the same time. A potent vampire could easily arrange a very nasty surprise for an unwary hunter.

Invulnerability: The vampire gets bonuses to its Stamina, reflecting that it is far tougher than a human. At weak levels the bonus is +2. At moderate levels the bonus is +4. The bonus is +6 for powerful vampires. Much like armor, this extra Stamina can be used to soak damage, including lethal damage. This bonus Stamina has no effect against fire or sunlight for weak vampires, but can allow more powerful ones to soak such damage.

It costs a point of Willpower to activate invulnerability for a scene.

Lightning Speed: Vampires can move far faster than humans in many cases. Lightning speed reflects this capability, allowing a vampire to travel great distances or to attack multiple times in a single turn. A newly created vampire might be able to take one extra action in a turn, whereas a moderately powerful vampire might get an extra action per turn for each point of Dexterity it has. Potent vampires can move so quickly that they seem to disappear and reappear in a moment, or even blur when they approach. Allow such a creature all the actions you want it to make.

Each extra action gained in a turn can be used to perform one feat only, and uses a full dice pool; multiple actions cannot be performed per activity.

Lightning speed is not without its cost, though. A point of Willpower must be expended for each turn in which the power is used. A weak vampire therefore gains one additional action for a single Willpower point, while a moderately strong bloodsucker with 5 Dexterity could perform six actions in a single turn by expending one point of Willpower. An ancient vampire can act as often as you like for a single Willpower point.

Mind Control: Vampires with this power can work subtly or with painful force to make others do their bidding. The most basic form of this power makes an opponent obey a simple one-word command. At moderate levels, a vampire can influence the way a target thinks with careful wording and delicate suggestion, perhaps winning a potential enemy to her side of an argument. Or, the vampire can alter a target's memories with mere suggestion, convincing the subject to misremember important details, or even exactly who or what it was the subject sought. At high levels, a vampire can make a target her slave, robbing him of any semblance of free will. This last power often takes subtlety and, in many cases, a great deal of time, but once a victim is captured by a vampire, it's almost impossible for him to truly break free.

Spend a point of Willpower and make a Willpower roll (based on rating, not current score) for a vampire using a mind-control power; difficulty equal to the target's Willpower. Success makes the person the vampire's minion. If a Conviction point is spent for a hunter in a scene, he is immune to mind-control attempts. If no point is spent, the imbued person is as subject to vampire influence as any mortal. The Storyteller may allow a hunter normally under vampire control to resist for any scene in which a point of Conviction is spent. When the scene ends, the hunter could fall under the creature's sway once again.

Superhuman Strength: Vampires can be far stronger than humans; superhuman strength reflects that power. Add two to Strength at low level, four at moderate level, and six at high level. These bonuses are also added to damage rolls involving brawl, melee or thrown-weapon attacks. The harm inflicted works just as regular damage does, but at the Storyteller's discretion bashing damage from truly powerful vampires may not be soaked.

Using superhuman strength is taxing: A point of Willpower must be expended for every scene in which the power is used.

The Walking Dead

I've heard all kinds of names for these things: deaders, rots, zombies, corpses. There are probably so many names because these things seem to be our most common adversaries. I don't know what it is about the walking dead, but they appear to be everywhere; far more common than vampires or witches. It's almost as if Heaven — or more likely Hell — is full, and leftover spirits are forced back to Earth. Almost every first-contact story I've heard has been about the walking dead. Maybe we're connected to them somehow.

Given zombies' numbers, it comes as no surprise that there seems to be a range of the creatures. I find it difficult to categorize them in any reasonable way until I have more information. However, the basis of all these beings seems to be the same: They are humans who are reanimated after death. What force awakens them, controls them or empowers them, I don't know. Perhaps it's warlocks' "magic." Perhaps it's vampire blood. Perhaps all the fairy tale reasons are true: a burning desire for vengeance, an unholy passion for someone or something.

I do not include vampires in this category. Instead of being something dead brought back to life, they actually seem to be a different kind of life. Vampires need sustenance in the form of blood. They lead complicated, multi-dimensional lives. The walking dead are at worst stiff-legged and tattered corpses that moan as they chase victims. At best, they appear to be virtually passionless individuals who can function in normal society nevertheless.

For convenience, I divide the walking dead into three categories. I have witnessed all three myself, and found them dissimilar enough to warrant this separation. They are not profoundly different as potential enemies, but there is a need to distinguish them if you hope to interact with them without a gun. Continuing the organization of this article as a whole, I discuss the three types from most human to least.

Horrors of the Walking Dead and Spirits

Normal humans cannot bear the sight of the walking dead or spirits when such a creature reveals itself as unliving or when it clearly cannot be alive (the creature's flesh rots from its bones and yet it walks, or the ghost is transparent and can step through walls). People become hysterical, have fits and seizures, flee the scene or ignore everything as if none of it were happening when confronted with such sights.

Hunters are not affected by this phenomenon as long as a point of Conviction has been spent to steel them for the scene. If no such point has been spent, a hunter is just as vulnerable to panic as the average person.

The Hidden

The hidden are walking dead who can pass as the living and go undetected among humans. They may be a bit pale, solitary, anti-social or a touch slow-witted. They seem to retain skills they had in life, although a comment Purple once made leads me to believe they do not continue to learn or improve their skills after death. ("She'll always be a bad driver," he said about one of the hidden I watched for a time, and she did seem to have trouble driving in the city.)

Hidden aren't so invisible to a hunter who knows what look for. Yet the hidden can easily insinuate themselves among people who have no reason to suspect that a new coworker has risen from the grave to track down and kill everyone involved in her hit-and-run death.

That was the case of a woman I watched for about two weeks. Beyond Purple, she was the first supernatural being that I recognized after my imbuing. I say that in my own defense, because I let her carry on much longer than I would have if I found her now. As it was, I couldn't very well turn to the police with wild stories of what I witnessed.

Observing this woman was a bit like watching a Jekyll and Hyde movie. During the day, she was a slightly dull and inefficient worker in a large downtown bank. After hours, she seemed to find new energy and became something of a predator, staking out a fraternity house at my university. It was only after a climatic evening that I realized she wasn't so random in her choice of day jobs. Turns out the bank where she got a job serviced many student accounts, and all her intended victims were among them.

That night, I watched as she entered a fraternity house and mercilessly hacked students to pieces with a hatchet. Four of them were in the car that killed her. The fifth was at the wrong place at the wrong time.

The woman didn't show up at work the next day. In fact, I assumed she returned to her grave or found another final resting place, but she reappeared about a month later with a killing spree that claimed the lives of several other fraternity members.

With the information I provided, two other hunters found her and put an end to her. So I do understand there are times when killing is the only option, but the walking dead may not be wholly themselves or even wholly intelligent. Still, I hope we might find a way to ease the suffering of these poor souls without resorting to violence.

It's important to note that it might be difficult to tell the difference between a hidden and a vampire, but unlike vampires, these walking dead can be active during the day.

I have another report about a walking dead that I believe to be a hidden, as well. This story comes from the original website. I'm not altering these pasted entries, so words like "monster" are not mine. You have to wonder about such words from a man who fights side-by-side with drug dealers. I wonder, at least.

I never would have suspected a thing if I hadn't seen him in action. He wasn't in great physical shape, but he tore through a whole gang of drug dealers. They shot him, cut him and hit him with a bat. He barely even noticed. I saw him break a punk's back with his bare hands. His fingers dug into the poor bastard's thigh and chest like they were putty.

The monster was a college professor, or at least pretended to be one, I guess. He was short and round, with almost no hair on his head, and he walked with a limp.

It took all of the gang members and me to finally bring him down. I was the only one who survived. I swear a wound on his chest sealed shut while I watched. He never bled! I hacked into his arm and neck, too, and he never bled!

Hidden Profile

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Abilities: (choose from) Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Drive 2, Etiquette 2, Expression 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 5, Melee 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 5, Survival 4

Willpower: 10

Powers: Hidden can pass for human, though second sight reveals them as *wrong*, whereas the Discern, Witness and Illuminate edges reveal them for what they are. Hidden can withstand 15 health levels of damage before being destroyed, but can regenerate one lost level with the expenditure of a Willpower point. Regenerating costs an action and only one level can be recovered in a single turn. The hidden suffer no wound penalties for lost health levels.

Walkers

A walker is most easily described as the mid-point between a hidden and the least human kind of walking dead, a shambler. A walker is an animated dead person, but unlike a hidden, a walker decomposes, albeit slowly. While definitely not as clear-headed as a hidden, a walker does have some sense, at least enough to attempt to mask its odor with perfume and clothing.

I call them "walkers" because they have at least a human-like range of motion. The easiest way to tell a walker from a shambler is from their limbs' range of motion. You'll know what I mean as soon as you encounter them.

A walker seems driven in its unlife by something that happened to it prior to death. Generally, this passion is never very complicated, or at least it's pursued directly as opposed to carefully as a hidden might do. For instance, the hidden I encountered took a job at a bank specifically to get information on her targets. A walker would never prepare like that. She would simply march right into the fraternity house and take care of the students, probably by killing everyone in the building.

Consider this example posted by an active participant on the original hunter-net:

I knew Bernie Thompson. He was a good man and a loving husband. Lisa was devastated when he died. We were all friends, so I did what I could to comfort her. After about two years, we became more than friends, despite my efforts to never get too close to anyone anymore.

We kept our relationship discreet. I had my own reasons, but her kids always thought of me as, "Uncle Mike," so letting on more would have been awkward.

The kids were asleep one night when Bernie and one of his old buddies showed up at the house to explain why I shouldn't be dating Lisa. (The stranger was still alive and seemed to think Bernie was too, and that I'd done Bernie some terrible wrong.) Bernie had looked better, but he wasn't all decomposed. Maybe the arid weather out here kept him... fresh?

I told Lisa to run inside and hide the kids. That's when Bernie was on me. His friend ran in and dragged Lisa from the house. She was screaming like mad.

I don't think Bernie had run into any of our kind before — he still smelled of dirt. Still, it was hard to fight my best friend, no matter what he'd become. He didn't have any problems beating the crap out of me. That's when I fought back and put him down — or so I thought.

I went after Lisa. She was on the ground, staring blankly at the house. Her attacker was gone. If I was feeling guilty, she must have been tearing herself up inside. I think my heart broke in that moment.

It was a stupid mistake. While I was feeling sorry for myself, Bernie's friend stepped from the shadows and shot me! All I could do was lie there while the guy helped Bernie up, and they ran off with Lisa. I crawled after them, screaming.

They found Bernie's friend, dead, a couple days later — and Lisa's body about a week after that. I was still in the hospital at the time. The police have left the case open. So have I. I'm going to find that bastard!

I'm sorry to disappoint the author of this post, but his desire for vengeance is likely to go unfulfilled. It seems that most walkers return to the grave after they've completed whatever business for which they arose.

I'd rather not talk about my own experience with walkers right now. It's something I'll have to come back to after this essay has been online for a while, assuming I don't receive a visit from my vampire friend.

Walker Profile

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Abilities: (choose from) Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Willpower: 8

Powers: Walkers have 10 health levels and suffer no penalties for injury. They can regenerate one lost health level in a turn at the expense of one Willpower point per level. Regenerating a level is considered an action. Walkers can pass for human with effort. Hunters' second sight perceives an unnaturalness about them. The Discern, Witness or Illuminate edges can be used to sense that walkers are the living dead, although simple close inspection can accomplish much the same.

Shamblers

The last of the three types of zombies, and decidedly the least human, is what I call a shambler. Take a good look at one; a shambler is unmistakably the walking dead. A human unaware of the existence of such things, seeing one in the dark and from a distance, might laugh at the "drunk." Up close, a shambler's decaying flesh and putrid odor are immediately obvious.

Shamblers walk with a characteristic shuffling gait and they don't seem to be well preserved, so they're slow-moving. They're also dull-witted, but that's not much of a factor; they're single-minded about tormenting and killing people. You might be able to out-run one of these things, but it will wear you down with dogged endurance.

Shamblers are at least as dangerous as walkers or even hidden for one simple reason: Unlike the other kinds of walking dead, shamblers often appear in groups. What possibly keeps these groups together (maybe the control of another being, like the vampire described previously?) is unknown. Perhaps what-

ever force that reanimates them awakens several at one time and these individuals are bound together until destroyed.

I suppose you could make a case that shamblers are nothing more than walkers or hidden in advanced decay, but I posit that they are not the latter — the hidden I tracked did not seem to continue to decompose. Of course, it's dangerous to make such assumptions (maybe the process is unnaturally slow?), but I'm guessing that if hidden don't decay further, then walkers are probably slow about it. Then again, shamblers may simply be animated by weaker stuff than are hidden or walkers.

Another difference may be that a shambler is reanimated by other beings (perhaps through witches' rituals), while hidden and walkers are driven by some unknowable other force, something that causes them to reanimate themselves. If this is the case, my categorization of the walking dead should be revisited. For now, I'm sticking with this approach, and shamblers are definitely the lowest of the bunch.

My first encounter with shamblers was from a distance. I'd solved a riddle posed by Purple, and awaited him at a cemetery north of the city. I was almost ready to give up on him when the dirt on a neighboring hill seemed churn and burst upward. I watched as three threadbare and gangly corpses stood and plodded away from their graves.

I followed them. They didn't look around at all, let alone notice me. It made me wonder then as I do now why these beings aren't detected by humans. Perhaps normal people can't cope with what they see and remain sane, so they rationalize excuses or simply blot out their memories.

In any event, as the creatures crossed a road outside the cemetery, a car rounded a corner and plowed into two of the things. They were thrown about 30 feet, and I was shocked to watch them stop rolling and get back to their feet. The car was totaled. The third one seemed to pause, as if considering whether to approach the car. After a few hesitant steps, it fell into pace with its companions who never even batted an eye.

I would have followed them, but the woman behind the wheel was unconscious and bleeding, so I hurried to a pay phone and called for help. By the time I returned to watch the scene from hiding, the police and an ambulance were present, and the shamblers were gone.

Shambler Profile

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

Abilities: Brawl 2, Intimidation 5

Willpower: 6

Powers: Shamblers are "killed" only by complete destruction of the body or separation of the head from the torso. Shamblers have 10 health levels and suffer no penalties for damage inflicted.

Conclusions about the Walking Dead

Here is a summation of what I've concluded regarding zombies.

1. They are incredibly strong and can withstand enormous amounts of punishment. Even worse, they don't slow down until they are stopped completely. A human with a bullet in his leg runs more slowly. Not a zombie. That means you never know whether your next bullet will do the job. Assume it won't, because that'll probably be the case.

2. In addition to sustaining severe amounts of punishment, the walking dead — at least hidden and walkers — have been witnessed healing the wounds they suffer. There can be two results: They may simply take longer to put down, or you might leave them for destroyed only to find them on your back a moment later.

3. Hidden and walkers seem to have specific purposes in mind, and these may or may not always be immediately life-threatening. If communication is possible — and it almost always is — then you might help them achieve their ends and put them to rest. Admittedly, the hidden I dealt with never seemed to get enough of killing fraternity members.

Goblins

This category feels like a bit of a stretch to me. Not only have I had only one encounter with these beings, but I only ever saw one post on the old site pertaining to a being I'm calling a "goblin." Other names might suit, as well: bugbear, bogeyman, troll. A better name will have to be applied once we have more information.

It's also toss-up to describe goblins as more human than ghosts, which is the next type of creature discussed. However, while ghosts may have a more human appearance, the fact that they are noncorporeal makes them less human to my thinking.

I found a group of goblins in the pediatric ward of a local hospital. Though I'm in college, I look pretty young. When I checked into the hospital for some investigation-related injuries, they cleared me from the emergency room up to the kids' ward. Only once I got there did somebody look at my college ID and send me back. Anyway, on my way downstairs, I passed the nursery. There was no one else inside or around except three nurses, and they didn't notice me. Nothing unusual — till one produced a needle and injected a baby. It made me wince, but I was terrified when the "nurse" drew blood, pulled the needle and sprayed the blood into her mouth!

I guess I instinctively looked at them with my sight. Their nurse disguises faded to reveal skinny, warty humanoids with pasty gray skin. They all turned to me at once and smiled. Theirs mouth were full of jagged teeth! It was one of the most frightening moments of my life. All those defenseless babies at the mercy of these things!

Before I could do anything, I heard a gasp behind me. I turned to see a tired-looking man make a vulgar exclamation. It was the first time I was present for another's imbuing. Maybe the man would have reacted another way if his own baby wasn't in the room with the monsters. The grinning baby-eaters blanched when the man grabbed a crutch leaning against a wall and burst through the nursery door toward the "women."

Two of the goblins fled immediately, but the third did something bizarre: It put its hand together and what looked like a sword made of bone or ivory appeared in its grip! The man didn't seem to think twice about pressing the attack. I can sympathize with the frenzy that occurs at the moment of imbuing; it took me days to piece together everything that happened to me. I can only imagine the intensity that protecting your own child adds to the experience.

The two crashed together, and the man was thrown backward amongst the cribs in the room. The babies all started crying. I think from the look of confusion or panic on the goblin's face that it hadn't expected trouble.

Just as the man got to his feet, all the cribs around him crashed into him. The goblin snarled as it ran through another doorway. The man was ready to chase after it when I yelled for him to stay still. I was amazed that none of the babies had been hurt so far, but they certainly would have been if the father had forced himself free.

I lied about what I saw to the security guards and helped get the man out of trouble. I introduced myself and advised that he try not to understand what had happened till he had his bearings. I've heard from him since, and he's done a lot of good work, but I'm afraid he still lacks the restraint that he did the night we met. I guess I can't blame him, though. The goblins apparently visited his home one night after he and his wife brought their son home.

My experience and the following article copied from the old site depict goblins in a poor light. It's possible that they're all flesh-eating monsters, but don't base your assessment on these accounts alone.

I was on my patrol — I'm a cop. I walk the streets instead of getting a fat ass. Anyway, I heard a woman screaming. I ran down to the scene and called for backup. When I got to the alley behind the Chinese restaurant, I saw a tourist couple being hassled by some local gang members, a bunch called [edited out by Bookworm55 to withhold the location of the incident and to protect the poster]. I was about to shout a warning when the leader of the punks took a bite out of the man's arm! I thought maybe the punk had become a deader, but I'd have heard if he'd been killed.

Anyway, I made a rookie mistake and yelled in shock. I wasn't really prepared — backup hadn't arrived, whether fellow officers or the other guys I patrol with.

Goblin Powers

Obliviousness: Normal people have trouble understanding or remembering encounters with goblins. Everyday people carry on in the presence of such creatures as if nothing untoward were happening. Normal people simply cannot see or recall what goblins do. Hunters are immune to this blindness as long as a point of Conviction has been spent for them to grant second sight and mental protection for the scene. Hunters without such abilities active are oblivious to the true forms and activities of goblins.

Active second sight reveals a goblin hiding in human form as *out-of-place*. Edges such as Discern, Illuminate and Witness are required to perceive what goblins really are, unless the creatures reveal their true appearance, in which case all people can recognize them.

Goblins can reveal themselves to onlookers. Their menacing appearance allows them to frighten off most people with a successful Manipulation + Intimidation roll, difficulty 6. A Willpower point must be expended for the effect. A hunter is immune to this emotion-control power if a point of Conviction has been spent for him for the scene. Human witnesses of such sights still don't recall what they saw when the dust settles.

Physical Prowess: Goblins tend to exhibit physical powers against humans and hunters — the ability to move quickly, leap distances or demonstrate unexpected strength. They may also have others that are unknown.

Gluttony: The most commonly encountered goblins have a predilection for eating, whether food, a living thing or an inanimate object, even items that would seem impossible to bite or digest — rocks, car batteries, street signs. Eating an indigestible item costs a point of Willpower for a scene. A tire disappears in a turn, while a car might take an entire scene to eat, all at the expense of one Willpower point. If a person is subjected to goblin jaws, damage is determined with a Willpower roll, difficulty 6. Each success equates to a lethal health level of damage.

Out of Thin Air: It's common for goblins to manifest items and weapons — pretty much any simple tool that can be held by hand — magically. This effect costs one Willpower point per item created.

Goblin Profile

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: (choose from) Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Drive 3, Empathy 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 5, Investigation 1, Melee 3, Security 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1, Survival 4

Willpower: 8

Weaknesses

Goblins are vulnerable to items or weapons made of cold iron. It causes them grievous injury by destroying their spirit. They cannot soak damage inflicted by such tools. This weakness is not common human knowledge; the imbued should have reason for knowing it (perhaps through a successful Intelligence + Occult roll, difficulty 6, or simple research). Only cold iron has this effect. Forged alloys such as steel and other metals like tin have no effect beyond the ordinary.

Next thing I knew, I was staring at five freaking monsters bearing down at me! They were big and pasty-skinned, with red hair. The leader had a do-rag on, and it looked like it was soaked with blood. The tourists had both passed out at that point. The bite victim was bleeding bad.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, they all had weapons in their hands! I ordered them to drop them and assume the position against the wall. That's when one "kid" threw an ax or something at me. It missed and I started shooting.

Two kids went down and looked completely normal again! The rest scrambled when the sirens started. The sweetest sound I ever heard. The tourists lived but couldn't remember a thing, and couldn't back up my story. I've been suspended with pay until the investigation is complete. I can't really do my other job, either; the force has detectives "checking up on me."

I connect my encounter and this incident as goblin-related because of the officer's description of mysterious weapons, and because of the apparently similar appearance of the creatures. I may be drawing an entirely incorrect conclusion, but these are all the facts at my disposal.

Spirits

The spirits category of beings also needs to be subdivided. First, there are what I think of as "true" ghosts. All of the beings in the spirit category may seem like ghosts, but I believe it's evident that there are at least two different varieties, the other being poltergeists. There's a third kind that is capable of possessing or inhabiting a human host's body, or it may be one of the other types manifesting a different power. I treat possession as a separate issue.

Ghosts

Ghosts appear to be the spirits of dead people who continue on in death as if they never passed away. They don't appear to be aware of or interested in what goes on in the real world around them. They seem to haunt the places where

they died or places of death in general (like cemeteries), or endlessly repeat their last hours of life. Ghosts may also have ghostly possessions in the afterlife or pseudolife or whatever it should be called. Take this story posted on the old site, for example. I guess it really happened, but it sure seems like a story out of some old comic book.

I chased down a zombie a few weeks ago and lost him in a part of town I'm not familiar with. That was sort of weird, because I'm a native of San Francisco and I was pretty sure I knew everything there was to know about the city.

It looked sort of like the Fisherman's Wharf area, but none of the buildings I'm familiar with were there: no Ripley's Museum, no Ghirardelli's Chocolate. None of it. Instead there were a bunch of buildings and wharves built from planks — no cement, no asphalt. The only thing that was familiar was a little two-story house that's been empty for years — a derelict, except now it was in much better shape than I've ever seen it.

The weird scene was bad enough, but there were no people anywhere. It was like I was in a store after closing. Next thing I knew, folks came out of the woodwork, but they were ghosts, not people. How could I tell? There wasn't much room for error: They all looked dead and their clothes were centuries out of fashion.

I figured I was dead too, when I saw a ship entering the harbor. It looked just like a model galleon I made when I was a kid, only it was crumbling and covered with seaweed. I saw a crew swinging swords. I just ran. I heard this loud laughter, from the old house I think, but I didn't dare turn to look.

The next day I worked up the courage to go back. All I found was the Fisherman's Wharf, same as ever. I hung around till after dark and burned down that old shack. I haven't seen the ghosts since, but I've seen the ship in different places along the coast, as if it's following me. I avoid the bay completely now.

Lots of thriller and romance writers have apparently been right on target with their ghost stories. A ghost ship and everything! The story sounds hackneyed, but I believe it, if only because I have a similarly gothic ghost story of my own.

At the end of one of my interviews with Purple, he invited me to a friend's house. I was leery at first, but agreed, anxious to get every scrap of information I could. Purple hadn't led me astray yet, at least as far as I could tell. He hailed a taxi. Though there are almost never any around in that part of the city, one rounded the corner right away. I also couldn't help notice how we hit every green light on the way across town.

The cab pulled up to an old house that reminds me now of the derelict our San Francisco associate mentions. It was an old place that I'd seen pictures of in the past. I'd even read articles about how it was supposed to be haunted, but nobody ever really believes that kind of thing. I'd been imbued long enough by that time to expect some truth to the stories. I wasn't disappointed: Purple knocked and a ghostly butler opened the massive doors.

The spirit didn't speak or even look at or acknowledge us in any way. But he did somehow manage to hold the door open, even though he felt insubstantial to me. I furtively put out my hand, which passed right through the tails of his tuxedo. No fabric. No zone of cold or anything like that. It felt like nothing.

Purple looked at me gravely and said, "They don't like it when we do that." I assumed he meant when living people touch ghosts, but I could never be certain with Purple.

The butler showed no sign of irritation and led us into a large sitting room. I imagine it's what a smoking room would look like, but I've never seen such a thing, so I can't be certain. A minute later, an incredibly old man doddered in. Not even his apparent age did him justice, because he was a ghost, too — he was even more transparent than his butler. He seemed a little disturbed by my presence, but Purple introduced me as the son of Either, whoever that is, and this seemed to satisfy the troubled ghost, who wanted to shake my hand. I looked at Purple, not sure if I should touch the ghost if I wasn't supposed to, but he nodded. While there was no sensation of actually touching anything, I did get a stiff chill when my hand "contacted" the outline of the ghost's. I did a rather poor job being a mirror-image of his handshake, but the ghost again seemed satisfied, so I sat when he did. The chill of that handshake never left me all evening.

I'll note briefly that this is where I learned Purple's real name; the ghost used it. I won't repeat it here, but I am investigating. If it leads to any breakthroughs concerning warlocks, I will share that information.

As soon as our conversation with the ghost started, a storm began to brew outside. The rain got quite intense, with thunder and lightning. I mention this only because the stormed died down and faded completely when the ghost eventually appeared to sleep.

The evening was bizarre and doesn't bear too many specifics — not that I could account them accurately, anyway. The old ghost and Purple launched into a conversation, but Purple barely paid attention. He seemed to know what the old ghost was going to say before it was said. Purple once answered before the ghost even finished the question, and the ghost seemed to notice. Purple apologized, and the old man went back to all kinds of chattering. I have absolutely no idea what they talked about. It sounded like chemistry, but I know some of that, so maybe it was alchemy. I got the impression that the conversation was identical every time Purple visited.

One other "ghostly" — if you will — thing happened while we were there. The butler brought in a tray of port, which I accepted and drank to be polite when I saw that Purple was drinking. The old ghost drank it as well, and when he swallowed I watched the liquid slide down his throat to his stomach. His swallow faded from view after a

The Nature of Spirits

To normal people, all spirits, including ghosts, poltergeists and possessors, are invisible and incorporeal, meaning that physical objects pass through them as if the spirits were mere projections. Conversely, spirits can pass through physical objects. There is a cost to a spirit for either activity: One Willpower point must be expended for a spirit in any scene during which she passes through a "real world" object or obstacle (a wall, for example) or has something or someone (a weapon, car or hand) pass through or intrude upon her. Spirits dislike this sensation, so they avoid such collisions whenever possible. Note that a spirit need expend only one Willpower point per scene; thereafter, she may pass through anything physical (or vice versa) without penalty.

A hunter employing second sight and edges perceives spirits as he would any physical entity. That does not mean punches and bullets — mundane attacks — affect a ghost, though. Edges are usually required to inflict any harm upon ghosts. Consider ghosts to have the same health levels as a living person. However, bashing and lethal attacks are all the same to them; they can all be soaked.

A spirit subsists on emotions, often ones tied to the reason the creature lingers after death in the first place. Some spirits wait for a mortal in their vicinity to experience anger, hope or fear, for example, whereas others use their powers to inspire such feelings in a target. Alternatively, a spirit can regain one Willpower point for every 24 hours she spends in undisturbed rest at or near a person, place or thing she haunts (see Ghost Weaknesses, below).

moment, but each time the ghost drank, I watched the port as if I had x-ray vision. It was very unnerving.

This all went on for some time until the old ghost seemed to doze off. Purple and I sat there a while longer, and Purple kept looking around as if he was confused. After several minutes, Purple suddenly told me it was time to leave.

After we left, I asked Purple why he bothered to speak to the old man if the conversation was always the same. (I didn't refer to him as a ghost in case Purple, in his seemingly addled state of mind, didn't realize what the man really was.) Purple answered, "When he sleeps, I can look in his library." Purple became excited then and shouted, "That's it! I look in his library!"

It was the last time I saw Purple. The old mansion burned down the next week. Upon hearing the news, I got the strange feeling that Purple decided to burn down the house instead of kill me after he snapped out of whatever spell he was under. I have no way to know. It was just a weird feeling.

Ghost Profile

The following describes an example of a new ghost, someone who died recently.

Attributes: Strength 3*, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: (choose from) Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 3, Computer 3, Crafts 3, Dodge 3, Drive 3, Etiquette 3, Finance 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Leadership 2, Medicine 2, Occult 2, Politics 1, Security 2, Subterfuge 4, Survival 4

Willpower: 8

The following represents an aged ghost, one who has been around for a century or so.

Attributes: Strength 6*, Dexterity 6, Stamina 7, Charisma 4, Manipulation 6, Appearance 3, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 6

Abilities: (choose from) Academics 3, Alertness 4, Animal Ken 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Computer 1, Crafts 2, Dodge 5, Empathy 3, Etiquette 4, Expression 4, Finance 4, Firearms 4, Intimidation 5, Investigation 4, Law 4, Leadership 3, Linguistics 3, Medicine 4, Melee 5, Occult 4, Politics 4, Science 3, Security 4, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 5, Survival 5

Willpower: 11

The following details an ancient ghost, one who has been dead for several centuries.

Attributes: Strength 8*, Dexterity 7, Stamina 9, Charisma 6, Manipulation 9, Appearance 6, Perception 7, Intelligence 7, Wits 8

Abilities: (choose from) Academics 7, Alertness 7, Animal Ken 5, Athletics 6, Awareness 5, Brawl 5, Dodge 5, Empathy 1, Etiquette 5, Expression 4, Finance 7, Firearms 3, Intimidation 7, Investigation 4, Law 4, Leadership 7, Linguistics 5, Medicine 5, Melee 6, Occult 5, Politics 7, Science 3, Security 5, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 7, Survival 7

Willpower: 14

*Note that the Strength Attribute for ghosts applies only to uses of powers along the lines of solidify (see Poltergeist Powers), wherein the ghost exerts his will to apply force against/ upon a physical object or entity.

Weaknesses

As creatures of habit, ghosts can be depended upon to frequent a single locale or to hang around a particular person. For hunters, this predictability means that ghosts can be easy to find. Ghosts who haunt places tend to do so in numbers (sometimes by the dozen), and they often defend one another. Some vampires "harvest" ghosts and find such clusters of spirits irresistible. Unlucky hunters may find themselves caught between the two groups.

Ghost Powers

Every ghost used to be a person, something reflected in each ghost's personality. Some of them use their powers to do harm, others try to eke out a benign existence. Hunters don't always have the time or inclination to separate one type from the other. The following are only samples of the powers that ghosts can possess. The Storyteller may design new ones or borrow ones from other classes of spirits.

New ghosts typically have three powers, none of them beyond a fairly low level. Old ghosts have four to five powers at weak to moderate levels. Ancient ghosts have five to six powers, each at moderate to potent levels.

Teleport: This power is typically limited to a ghost's line of sight. Ghosts teleport to avoid harm or elude detection. They can use this ability in combat. With age and expertise, a ghost can even teleport to locales beyond line of sight. A ghost subjected to the Burden power cannot teleport unless the immobilizing power is broken. A Willpower point allows a ghost to teleport once per turn.

Short Circuit: Although the name of this power implies targets limited to electronics, ghosts can use short circuit to affect (as in activate or jam) even simple machines — the trigger of a gun, for example. Experienced ghosts can use short circuit to send a jolt of electrical current through any conductive substance (metal or water) to shock a mortal in contact with an appropriate object (a rifle or puddle). Base short-circuit damage upon a number of dice equal to the ghost's Willpower rating, difficulty 6; damage can be bashing or lethal. This power also has the potential to render machines with electrical systems temporarily or permanently inoperable.

It costs a point of Willpower to activate short circuit for each use.

Emotion Control: Ghosts with this power can influence a mortal's emotional state. Young, inexperienced ghosts can spur only blunt feelings such as lust, grief or fear. Older ghosts' range includes joy, hope and love, which can be induced to near-paralyzing levels. Ancient ghosts expert in controlling humans' emotions can imbed a strong feeling about some entity, activity or location. Thereafter, the person remains convinced that he *always* felt that way.

Spend a point of Willpower and make a Willpower roll (based on rating, not current score) for a ghost using an emotion-control power; difficulty equals the target's Willpower. Success induces the desired emotion in the target. A ghost that instills an emotion in order to feed receives a point of Willpower for each success rolled in the effort, up to the being's normal Willpower limit. Using emotion control to feed can be accomplished only once per scene.

If a Conviction point is spent for a hunter in a scene, he is immune to emotion-control attempts. If no point is spent, the imbued person is as open to ghostly meddling as any mortal. The Storyteller may allow a hunter already under ghostly emotion control to resist for any scene in which a point of Conviction is spent. Once the scene ends, the hunter may again be a slave to feelings implanted by the spirit.

Poltergeists

I call this next group of spirits "poltergeists." That word literally means "noisy ghost" in German, and poltergeists are indeed like ghosts, but worse if you can imagine that. Where ghosts tend to keep to themselves, poltergeists seem as intent on hurting us as we might them. They are ghosts with bad attitudes, I suppose, which may mean there's not really a difference of types as much as a difference in individuals.

I suspect there is a difference in type, though. While ghosts seem more concerned with "global" effects (like making Fisherman's Wharf look like it did a hundred years ago), poltergeists are more concerned with local effects, with what one hunter-net poster called "deliberate" effects — rotting floorboards beneath your feet, causing a wall to drip blood, or moving something from one part of the house to another. These phenomena do not seem intended to entertain subjects, but to scare them or cause harm. Sometimes, however, poltergeists apparently form attachments to one or more people, and these unwitting folks are subject to friendly pranks. Such spirits tend to interpret the actions of others toward their chosen humans in black-and-white terms. The slightest misstep and the poltergeist heaps misery on the offender.

Take this next post, for instance. The spirit of the small girl (who the author calls a "ghost" but whom I believe fits my "poltergeist" category) might have left the couple in the house alone if she didn't believe her "friends" had turned their backs on her.

Eventually someone is gonna find out what you do. Or if not, you're better at this than me. For me it was my brother, Jack. Jack asked me to look into a situation with his girlfriend, who was having problems with the house she'd moved into: things being moved, stovetops being turned on — that kind of thing. We told her I was in construction and that I could fix anything.

I took a look and detected some kind of a presence in the house. Jack took her away for the weekend to get her out of the way. Maybe I was getting cocky, but I figured it couldn't be all that hard; one little ghost, and from what I could figure, just the spirit of a little girl.

I don't know how she died, but she didn't like me messing with her shit. She went from making noises to throwing things. I had to run from the living room when she got ahold of the fireplace pokers. Stupid. I wound up in the kitchen, which was worse.

I got the little bitch, but she left me with 115 stitches to remember her by.

Regrettably, the author doesn't indicate exactly how he resolved this matter, but we can probably assume that he found some means of physically interacting with the poltergeist, or perhaps confronted her with a token of her sad fate among the living.

I've personally had a number of encounters with poltergeists, and I'm happy to say that I've resorted to destruction in only one case. I've found that as much as a poltergeist may seem to haunt a place, such a tendency may

actually be more the domain of ghosts. Poltergeists appear to be more attached to specific items, like a mirror or child's toy. Removing it prompts the poltergeist to move as well. In my one case, an old log book continued to find its way back to a train station. The poltergeist's behavior became increasingly harmful until I had no choice but to destroy the book. The flames spread unusually fast. I had to get out of the station, but a fire truck arrived in time to put it out. That was the last I heard of the spirit.

Poltergeist Profile

The following describes an exemplary young poltergeist, one dead only a short time.

Attributes: Strength 4*, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: (choose from) Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Computer 3, Crafts 3, Dodge 3, Drive 3, Etiquette 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Leadership 2, Medicine 2, Occult 2, Politics 1, Security 2, Subterfuge 4, Survival 4, Technology 3

Willpower: 8

The following represents an older poltergeist, one dead for perhaps a century.

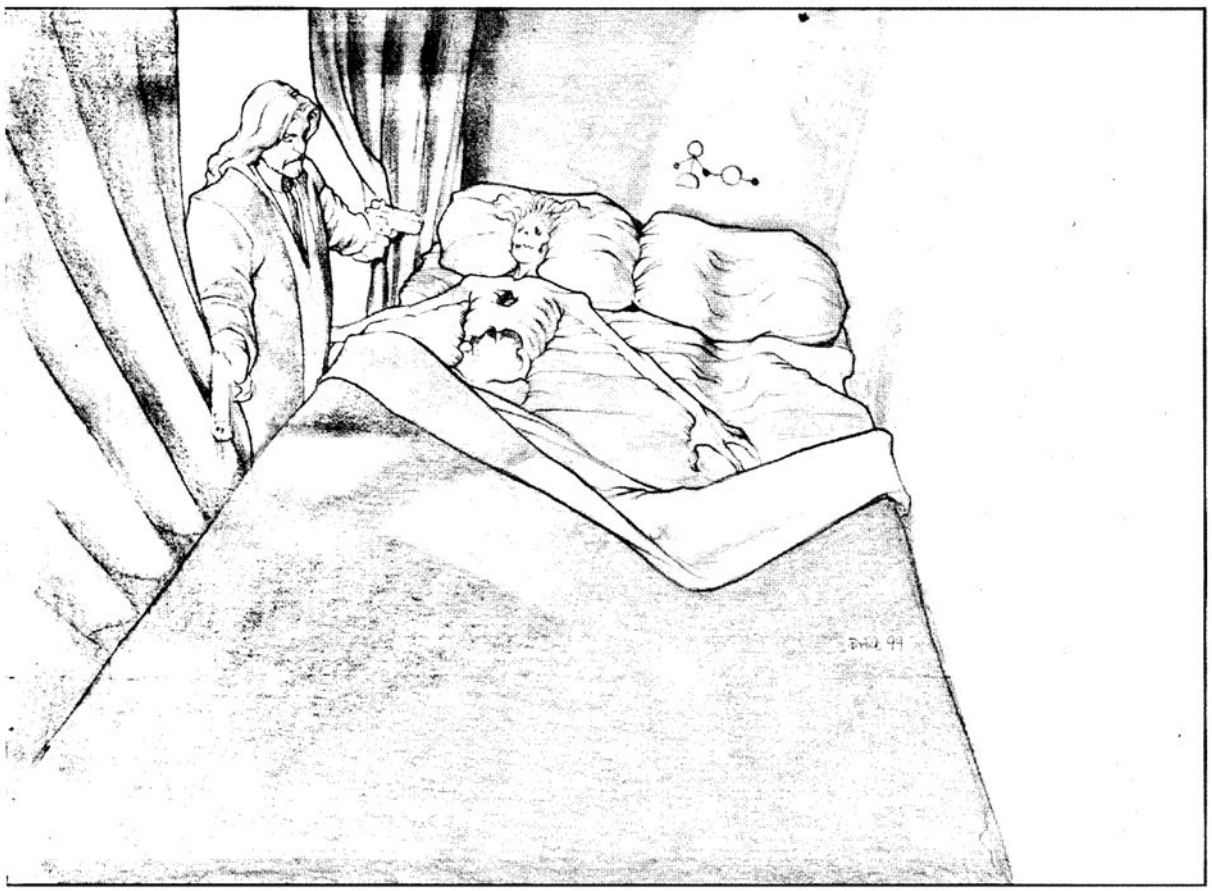
Attributes: Strength 5*, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 6

Abilities: (choose from) Academics 3, Alertness 4, Animal Ken 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Computer 1, Crafts 2, Dodge 5, Drive 2, Empathy 3, Etiquette 4, Expression 4, Intimidation 5, Investigation 3, Leadership 3, Linguistics 2, Medicine 4, Occult 4, Politics 4, Science 3, Security 4, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 5, Survival 5, Technology 1

Willpower: 11

The following details a rare poltergeist who has been hanging around for hundreds of years.

Attributes: Strength 7*, Dexterity 6, Stamina 7, Charisma 5, Manipulation 7, Appearance 4, Perception 6, Intelligence 6, Wits 7



Abilities: (choose from) Academics 7, Alertness 7, Animal Ken 5, Athletics 6, Awareness 5, Brawl 6, Crafts 1, Dodge 5, Empathy 1, Etiquette 5, Expression 4, Intimidation 7, Investigation 4, Leadership 7, Linguistics 3, Medicine 5, Occult 5, Politics 7, Science 3, Security 5, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 7, Survival 7

Willpower: 14

*The Strength Attribute comes into play for poltergeists only when a power such as solidify (see Poltergeist Powers) is used to apply force against/ upon a physical object or entity.

Weaknesses

Subsisting on base emotions such as fear, anger and frustration, poltergeists seldom survive to the grand age that the oldest ghosts reach. Whether this is true because poltergeists chase away their own sustenance or because other spirits put them down as "inconvenient neighbors" is uncertain. However, while they exist, these spirits can be real trouble.

Possession

As I stated before, I don't know if the ability to possess someone is available to all spirits, or if that's how a certain variety interacts with the world. (By possession, I mean a spirit occupying the same space as a human or animal and somehow controlling the living being.) No possessed individual has ever answered my questions on the subject. And no, that's not dumb: Spirits can still speak through their hosts.

Dealing with possession victims is one of the most difficult trials you can face as a hunter. You must use restraint now more than ever. You have to remember that the person — perhaps even a child — is not responsible for his actions. He's under the direct control of another being. This is all the more frightening when you realize that the spirit has absolutely no concern for the well-being of its host. If you strike its body down, probably killing or injuring a harmless person, the spirit simply slips away — or returns in another body if it's angry enough. And the new victim may be the last person you expect — a loved one or even another hunter.

Consider this sad story posted on the original hunter-net.

I didn't mean to kill the old man. It was a bad situation and it came down to him or me: I was unarmed and he had a shotgun! I think the thing inside was convinced it had me, but I can be quick. I knocked the gun aside and hit him as hard as I could. The poor bastard fell out a window. I heard two screams when he died: the old man's and another, meaner sound that sent shivers down my spine. I didn't know at the time that there was a ghost inside the old man, making him do all that stuff. I didn't learn the truth till later.

The ghost must have followed me after I slipped out the back of the old apartment building. About three days later, it came back. This time it took my girlfriend. She was only five-

Poltergeist Powers

Almost by definition, "noisy ghosts" aren't interested in fitting in unnoticed among humanity or using their abilities for subtle manipulation. These angry, destructive spirits *might* be so patient as to direct their powers against items whose breakage generates the desired human response — but typically not. Whereas ghosts often try to hide their activity, a poltergeist lets it all hang out (a levitating brick inspires terror even before it flies at someone's head). The following are only samples of the powers that poltergeists can possess. The Storyteller may design new ones or borrow ones from other classes of spirits.

Young poltergeists typically have three powers, none of them beyond a fairly low level. Older ones have four to five powers at weak to moderate levels. Antiquated poltergeists, who are uncommon indeed, have five to six powers, each at moderate to potent levels.

Solidify: This power encompasses the effects associated with the classic poltergeist: invisibly moving or striking objects or living things, inexplicable noises, and so on. Poltergeists who've been stirring up trouble for decades can set an entire roomful of small items in motion at once. True masters of solidify can send furniture flying and even upend cars. A Willpower point allows a ghost to activate solidify once per turn.

Ick: Whereas ghosts are usually reluctant to employ this power, poltergeists show no such hesitancy. Ick produces copious amounts of a slick, mucous goo wherever the poltergeist desires. Common uses include contamination of foods (for the purpose of gross-outs) and the ensliming of floors or roadways (to create hazardous conditions). Apply the line-of-sight rule to placement of ick (i.e., not beyond the user's view). Expert poltergeists can cause ick to manifest inside the nose and mouth of a target (even a moving one) to suffocate him. This substance can be expelled or removed, but an affected character can do nothing else until his breathing passages are clear.

It costs a point of Willpower to activate ick. Roll a number of dice equal to the poltergeist's Willpower, difficulty 6, to determine how many quarts of ick result (one per success). Ick lingers for no more than one scene, then vanishes without a trace.

Combustion: Poltergeists use this power to start fires.

The speed with which such flames ignite depends on the expertise of the spirit and the flammability of the targeted material. A young poltergeist can set a cotton garment ablaze in three turns; an older, more seasoned one in two turns; a crusty, malevolent poltergeist can do so in one turn (roll Willpower, difficulty 6). The less flammable the substance, the higher the difficulty (wood: difficulty 7; normally flame-resistant fabric: difficulty 8; hard plastic: difficulty 9; glass, ceramics and durable metals cannot be ignited with combustion).

The wearer or bearer of something targeted with combustion gets to make a Wits + Alertness roll each turn to determine if he notices the item's increasing heat.

One point of Willpower activates combustion against one target. The user must apply the power without interruption for flames to result.

two, maybe 110 pounds soaking wet. I didn't expect to be thrown across the room. I hit hard enough to break two ribs and the beam behind the dry wall. She stood over me with this insane look, screaming all kinds of fucked up shit about me killing her and how she was going to get me. That's when I made the connection to the old man.

This story illustrates a good point, especially where possession victims are concerned: Even if your morals don't keep you from killing defenseless people, you are not above the law. A dead body is a dead body as far as the police are concerned. They won't believe your stories about what was inside it. They have no idea what you're talking about. If that danger alone is enough to keep you from killing human hosts, then please come up with another plan.

Take the following post, for example. This gentleman not only showed restraint, but he had enough evidence to avoid trouble with the law. Keep in mind that evidence of self-defense may have to be self-inflicted.

What are you supposed to do when you have to fight a little kid? I'm over six feet tall and weigh 235 pounds. I used to do some boxing; I'm no pushover. I know what to do against a zombie. They're dead already and determined to kill. Little kids are a different story.

He was about seven, and I just couldn't bring myself to hit him. It was like child abuse, even though he had a knife. He slashed at my legs and groin, but all I could think about was killing a poor kid.

Finally, I grabbed his arm, pinned him and hog tied him. I think that's when the spirit left his body in frustration; the kid just started crying. I didn't know if it was a trick or not. Now the kid's getting counseling. I got off the hook, but I still feel like shit.

I have only one posted example of a possessed animal. I haven't encountered the phenomenon myself, but I have little doubt that it's possible. If a human's mind and body can be controlled, why not an animal's? I guess an animal's mind could be easier to influence because it's less complex. But then, an animal might be more difficult to control because it's foreign to once-human spirits. Maybe animal spirits possess the bodies of other animals, for that matter.

Here's the post as I've copied it.

There is a small village, not far from where I live, where people were being killed by wild animals. Because of my position, I was asked to attend to the matter. I expected to find a lion that was starving or that had gone mad. Instead, I arrived in time to see a pack of hyenas circling the village. I have encountered hyenas all my life. They are not brave animals. Though they might attack a lone child or even an adult if they are hungry enough, I have never heard of or seen them attack a village.

The hyenas saw me coming and sat perfectly still, studying me as I studied them. I saw that they were not in control of themselves. The ghosts of several men I knew when I was

Possession Profile

Ratings are provided for normal people and animals, and for possessed bodies (in parentheses).

These statistics are for an adult human.

Attributes: Strength 3 (7), Dexterity 3 (5), Stamina 3 (5), Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3 (5)

Abilities: (choose from) Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl (3), Dodge (3), Firearms (2), Intimidation (4), Melee (2), Occult (3), Stealth 3, Subterfuge (3), Survival 1 (3)

Willpower: Appropriate to type of ghost

These statistics are for a child.

Attributes: Strength 1 (4), Dexterity 3, Stamina 2 (5), Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 2 (4), Wits 3 (5)

Abilities: (choose from) Alertness 2, Dodge 1, Melee (3), Performance 2, Stealth 3 (4), Subterfuge 3

Willpower: Appropriate to type of ghost

Powers: A spirit in possession of a human host may not be able to manifest any of its unearthly powers, or it may have access to some or all of those powers available to it. A possessing spirit that abandons its host certainly has a full range of powers. A spirit still in a body may attempt to disguise its existence, protect its host or attack anyone who threatens. A liberated ghost could attack, disappear or attempt to possess another being, human or animal.

A hunter with active second sight sees the superimposed image of the ghost overlaying the body it controls. Spending a point of Conviction for a hunter makes her immune to possession attempts for a scene. If a hunter is possessed when defenses are down, subsequent Conviction expenditures, if any, may give the character self-control for the duration of the scene or may expel the possessing spirit automatically.

Like humans who are possessed by spirits, animals are made substantially stronger. These statistics are for a large dog.

Attributes: Strength 3 (6), Dexterity 4, Stamina 2 (4), Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 2 (4), Wits 1 (3)

Abilities: (choose from) Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Intimidation 3, Stealth 3, Survival 3

Powers: None, but once the animal is stopped or destroyed, the hunter must deal with the disembodied spirit. This spirit could attack, disappear or attempt to possess another being, human or animal.

A hunter with active second sight sees the superimposed image of the ghost overlaying the animal it controls.

a child possessed them, riding within their bodies and making them do things they would not normally do.

These men were from my village and they did not understand that we had made peace with the other long ago. Before I could explain, they attacked. I was prepared and used the rifle I received as a gift from my uncle. I killed the animals, and then used the gifts I have been given to send the spirits back to where they belonged. They were very strong. The hyenas they controlled had terrible strength.

Spirits present a number of problems in all their various forms. I summarize these and other apparent abilities here.

1. Most spirits are noncorporeal, which means they are very difficult to harm in a physical manner. Unfortunately, when spirits do assume physical form, it's often in a possession victim. Fortunately, many hunters' special abilities that I've witnessed and heard of can affect spirits, even those hiding within living bodies.

2. Ghosts appear to have what I call a zone of control. Within this zone, they can do many different things, like radiate cold, brew a thunder storm or even roll back time as at Fisherman's Wharf. A poltergeist seems to operate in a much smaller area, though the effects are more immediate and powerful. Some spirits that possess victims have been reported to use powers at the same time, and to impart great strength to their hosts.

3. Ghosts seem to exist in repeating patterns or at least have habits they cannot shake. They always walk the same stretch of road or are always active at the same time of night. Poltergeists seem to be attached to even more particular areas (again, a small "zone of control"). For instance, they cannot leave a particular spot or they are always near a certain item.

Shapechangers

It comes as no surprise to me that werewolves exist. Or at least, beings we may as well dub werewolves walk the Earth. If I can accept that vampires, ghosts, zombies and goblins exist, it's really no stretch to accept that creatures who can assume the shapes of people and animals are real. In fact, shapechangers seem to be the closest thing to *natural* in the *supernatural* world. Yet there's no denying that a half-person, half-animal is not really true to either of the species that makes it up.

Reported werewolf behavior only seems to compound their paradox. They have been known to hurt hunters, save hunters and in my case advise hunters. Yet of one thing there is little doubt: shapechangers are formidable fighters and, at their worst, the least human-appearing of the beings we face.

Let me illustrate by way of a couple posts from the old web site. I'm saving my own experience with werewolves to close not only this section, but this report.

We were set up. Someone or something caught wind of us, and we were set up. Not just a few rots, but a mob of them. I had two other hunters with me. We were prepared for trouble, but it got out of hand fast. Raj, may he rest in peace, was torn to pieces. There was nothing Audrey or I could do about it. We were both too busy trying to find a way out of the place with our heads still attached. Whoever set us up did a great job: Two heavy dumpsters blocked our entrance into the alley, and all the windows into the surrounding buildings were barred. It looked hopeless until they showed up.

By "they" I mean four of the biggest dogs I'd ever seen. "Fuck me!" I thought. Like a mob of walking dead wasn't enough. But that's when the lead mutt leapt full into the air and tore into one of the rots! The others crashed into the crowd right behind.

But even with the weird dogs' help, there were just too many corpses. I managed to pry one off me when the first of the dogs went down. About three seconds later, he came back up, only he wasn't a dog anymore. Dogs don't stand 10 feet tall, and they sure as hell don't carry big-ass knives. I wish I could explain what that thing looked like, but it isn't easy. Sort of like something between a bear and Big Foot, only bigger and meaner. Then the others in the pack changed, too, growing bigger and wider. Two of them stayed on all fours, and two stood on their hind legs, like people.

All four of them were torn and cut and scraped to shit, but the wounds just disappeared like they'd never been there. The good news was the zombies didn't get back up after the monsters were done with them. I never saw anything move so fast or cause so much damage. One of them pushed a rot through a brick wall — clean inside the building.

When it was over, there was just me, Audrey and the four of them. One of them seemed to shrink a little and asked gruffly if we were okay. I think I nodded.

That's one side of the werewolf equation. Here's another.

I was in Mexico City for the Day of the Dead. I wanted to see what happened down there, and if the deaders would make anything special of it. They did, but that's another story.

This story is about how I got myself lost in the worst way. There are parts of Mexico City where an American shouldn't go, and I managed to get stuck in one when the sun was setting. I was doing my best to stay calm when I "saw" the werewolf. It was sitting with two guys, playing a game of dice and losing. I guess it didn't take that too well. When the guys started laughing, it changed. One of them ran away, screaming like the Devil himself was biting his ass. The other one pulled a knife and started yelling something in Spanish. I don't speak much Spanish.

What I do know is, this thing was huge. *It stood in the street and howled loud enough to almost deafen me. Then it grabbed the guy with the knife and just tore him in half. I've done my share of fighting zombies, but I've never in all my time seen something like that.*

Call me stupid — I do every day — but I tried to stop it. It didn't tear me in half, but it tried damn hard. The doctor says another six or seven months and I might be able to use my left arm again. I certainly won't be hunting anymore. Even if I could, I don't have the guts to face something like that again.

Maybe this werewolf tangled with the hunter only because he interfered — and rightfully so. As long as these creatures try to kill people, they can expect more conflicts with the imbued. If it's a form of vigilante justice the werewolves exact, then they're going too far with it.

I have one more old post about werewolves. It's important to provide all these given how enigmatic shapechangers seem to be. The more info we share, the more we all know, and the more people and perhaps even souls we can save.

I've heard some stories: There are things out there that can look human and then "change." I saw one — I think — late at night. It was wrecking a construction site, the framework for a new shopping center.

It used its strength and size to do most of the damage, and then sat down on what was left of a bulldozer and drank a beer! I looked right at it, but I couldn't believe it existed. It was like my mind didn't want to accept it, but I forced it to.

After about 10 minutes, it got agitated and looked around. I heard the sirens a few seconds later. The thing was right in front of my eyes, like my hand in front of my face — and then it was gone. It just vanished! I didn't see it move past me, but I think I felt the heat of its breath.

So what was this shapechanger doing? Maybe it was making a statement about the construction site. At least, that's all I can think. Maybe now you understand why I'm so baffled by werewolves.

Yet despite the confusion, there are some facts we can rely upon.

1. Shapechangers seem to have a range of transformation, all the way from animal to man-beast to human.

2. A full moon does not appear to be required for this transformation.

3. There's no known evidence to suggest that a bite turns a survivor into a shapechanger. In fact, I get the impression from my experience that there's a genetic basis for werewolves, so maybe they're another race that's co-existed with humans for... forever?

Shapechanger Profile

Shapechangers are commonly wolves, but can also combine human form and that of a different animal. Shapechangers can take several different shapes between human and animal. The following statistics represent a werewolf in each of its five forms. The base rating is that of human form, followed by parenthetical ratings for these shapes: mostly human/ man-beast/ mostly wolf/ wolf. It takes an action to change shape and costs a Willpower point to change from one form to another, whether from human to nearly human or human to wolf.

Human form is exactly that. A hunter with active second sight perceives that something is amiss about a shapechanger in this form, but actual detection edges — such as Discern — are required to understand the creature's true nature. Werewolves in human form have no special abilities.

A werewolf in "mostly human" shape is stronger and on the average a foot taller than a normal person. The being is a little hairy; the change is radical enough that it's difficult to recognize a person in this stage. In "man-beast" form, the creature gains tremendous mass and size; the average height of these creatures is nine feet, with a weight of nearly 400 pounds. Anyone looking at a werewolf in man-beast form knows it's inhuman. In "mostly wolf" form, a werewolf looks almost exactly like a wolf, but it's larger. In "wolf" form, a werewolf looks like, and for all intents is, a wolf. Second sight still indicates a shapechanger in nearly wolf or wolf form as *wrong*, whereas detection edges explain how.

The following ratings are for an average werewolf.

Attributes: Strength 3 (5/7/6/4), Dexterity 4 (4/5/6/6), Stamina 3 (5/6/6/5), Charisma 2, Manipulation 3 (2/0/0/0), Appearance 3 (2/0/3/3), Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Abilities: (choose from) Alertness 2, Animal Ken 2, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 4, Drive 1, Empathy 1, Expression 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 4, Melee 2, Occult 2, Stealth 4, Streetwise 5, Subterfuge 3, Survival 3

Willpower: 10

The following ratings are for a huge werewolf.

Attributes: Strength 4 (6/8/7/5), Dexterity 4 (4/5/6/6), Stamina 5 (7/8/8/6), Charisma 2, Manipulation 5 (4/0/0/0), Appearance 2 (1/0/2/2), Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Abilities: (choose from) Academics 2, Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 4, Brawl 5, Computer 1, Dodge 5, Drive 2, Empathy 1, Etiquette 3, Expression 3, Finance 2, Firearms 4, Intimidation 5, Investigation 3, Law 2, Leadership 4, Linguistics 2, Medicine 2, Melee 3, Occult 4, Politics 1, Security 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3, Survival 4

Willpower: 14

Weaknesses

Silver causes one level of damage each time it comes in contact with a werewolf. Even a small amount of silver that's not in the form of a weapon — jewelry, for example — inflicts this damage. A weapon made of silver inflicts normal damage. Health levels lost to silver in any form cannot be soaked. Nor can they be regenerated.

4. In man-animal form, shapechangers are immensely strong, perhaps stronger than any other being of which I've heard.

My own encounter with werewolves was odd, to say the least. On my way back to the dorm one afternoon, I came across a teenager sitting on a bench, red-faced like he'd been crying — or was trying not to. Normally I might have left him alone, but since my change, I take on more responsibility for the people around me. I stopped to see if he was all right.

Push almost came to shove, but he finally admitted he was a runaway; that he was fine, only hungry. My scholarship offers more meal credit than I need, so I took the kid to the campus cafeteria.

While we ate, he told me an amazing story that I'll share in a future addendum to this article. Essentially it was about his life as "kin" to a special family. He was evasive about the family, but was upset that he wasn't fully accepted for some reason. The kid looked human to my sight, but I still sensed something strange about him, so I egged him on for more information to find out what this "family" might really be.

He alluded to a few more details, but nothing that I could make sense of. That's when he got a shocked look on his face, and swore. I followed his stare to see a group of three adults, two women and a man, outside the window. One woman and the man appeared to be a couple. Their features reminded me of Native Americans. The second woman was young and Caucasian. She pointed around the campus like she was some sort of tour guide. I used my sight and *knew* the feral features of the Native man and woman. I surmised they were *something*, but I wasn't sure what at the time.

Of course, using my particular sight immediately drew the couple's attention to me — right through the plate-glass window — as it did with other beings I had studied. They seemed irritated at first, as if I had intruded upon them, but their eyes quickly diverted to the teenager with me.

The man motioned both of the women to stay put, and strode through the cafeteria doors. The boy pleaded, "Thanks for the food, but please don't mention what I told you."

Werewolf Powers

Hysteria: In addition to changing shapes, werewolves have several powers. The mere presence of a werewolf in any form other than human or wolf is enough to drive normal people (and hunters for whom a point of Conviction has not been spent) mad. They flee in terror, become catatonic or overlook the whole scene. Any contact with werewolves is also forgotten completely. Hunters with active protection from mind control (a point of Conviction has been spent for the scene) are immune to these effects.

Speed and Resilience: Werewolves can take extra actions during combat turns, and they can regenerate damage they sustain. A werewolf may take a number of additional actions equal to its Dexterity rating in a turn, with the expenditure of one Willpower point. Thus, a werewolf with 5 Dexterity has a total of six actions. Each extra action can be used to perform only one feat; multiple feats for each action are not allowed.

Werewolf actions may be used to heal. Damage is removed at the rate of one health level, whether bashing or lethal, per action dedicated to regenerating. Each level recovered also costs one Willpower point. Regeneration cannot heal wounds inflicted by fire or silver.

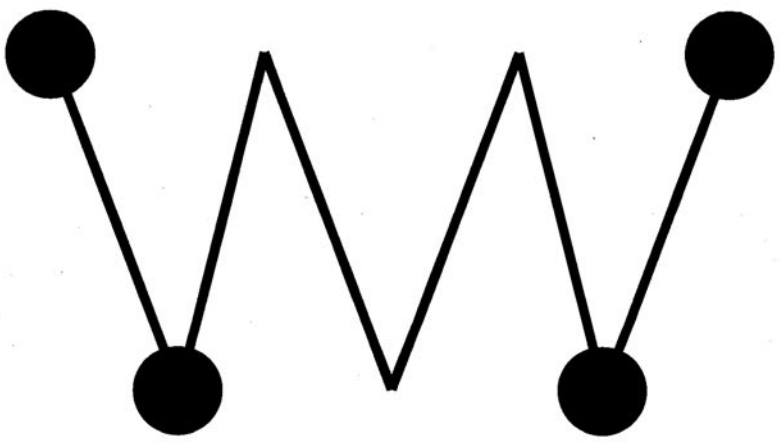
Werewolf speed and healing can be combined in the same turn. If a Willpower point is spent to give extra actions to a werewolf with 4 Dexterity, the creature may heal two health levels of damage (for an additional two Willpower) and take three other actions in the turn.

Claws and Teeth: The claws and teeth of a werewolf inflict Strength +1 lethal damage. Neither form of harm can normally be soaked by hunters, unless armor is worn. There is no Willpower cost for these bonuses.

Predatory Skills: Werewolves have innate, heightened senses that allow them to track their prey through almost impossible terrain, across rivers, and even through areas of heavy traffic without losing the scent. This power requires a Perception + Alertness roll, with a difficulty that ranges from 4 (in a forest on a clear day) all the way to 9 (the tracks are old, there is a lot of traffic in the area and it has been raining). Success means a shapechanger can continue to follow the trail for up to an hour or day, depending on the circumstances, even if the trail is broken and faded.

The same roll can allow some werewolves to "see" with their heightened hearing much like a bat uses sonar. They can find their prey easily, even in complete darkness. The Blind Fighting/ Fire rules (p. 192) do not apply to these werewolves.

Vanishing: Most werewolves have the ability to disappear, almost as if they leave the world itself. They must look at a reflection to accomplish this feat. A successful Willpower roll, difficulty 6, is required, and a Willpower point must be spent. It takes one action to disappear in this way. Not even hunter second sight or detection edges can locate a "departed" werewolf.



The man gave me a piercing stare when he reached our booth. "Timothy. It's time to go home." He helped the boy from his seat and they walked out. Before they left, the man turned to me briefly — and I think he sniffed at me. Outside, the "family" parted ways with the tour guide, who seemed miffed. Then they went around the building to what I knew was the service entrance, a private area.

Partly out of curiosity, partly because I wanted to make sure the boy wasn't going to be hurt, I snuck the other way around the building. I hid around the corner and heard them talking. I could see their shadows against an opposite wall. The man was speaking and gestured at the boy. "Would you have been happier if I just showed this to your friend?"

Then the most amazing transformation took place. I could see only silhouettes, but in the space of a second, the man's shadow grew tall and bestial. It was like he put on a costume and stood near a light to caste a huge, distorted image. I wanted to look but couldn't budge.

The boy muttered, "No," and the man told him to get moving. The woman and boy walked back the way they came. I started to edge away, afraid that the "man" knew I was spying. He did. "Use your light for knowledge, not for blinding," he said aloud. Then he was gone, too.

In retrospect, the shapechanger's words are the most profound I've ever heard. Maybe they don't seem so meaningful in black and white, but when you know your life could have been snuffed out — but was spared — you get sentimental. Hopefully you'll feel the same if you encounter a shapechanger. Though we've heard stories of werewolf killing machines, my encounter redeems them all for me — or at least tells me they're not all bad. Try to find out where yours lies before you start shooting and swinging.

So that's it. That's the bulk of the information I've amassed and assembled. Many of the beings I've discussed seem to have little if any regard for human safety, and it's terrifying to realize how prevalent they are. They aren't at every street corner, home or subway station, but they seem to turn up with disturbing frequency. Sure, a warlock tipped me off to many of my encounters, but plenty of others like the goblins in the pediatric ward were pure chance.

But for every man-eating beast I've encountered, I've spoken with a so-called monster that seemed more noble and, if you will, *human* than a lot of the people I've known. I know others have lost more — family and friends — but I've lost my legs to a "monster," so I have as much reason as anyone to hate them. But I don't. Maybe you can take a cue from me and give the "enemy" the benefit of the doubt. Innocent until proven guilty, right?

APPENDICES

For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.

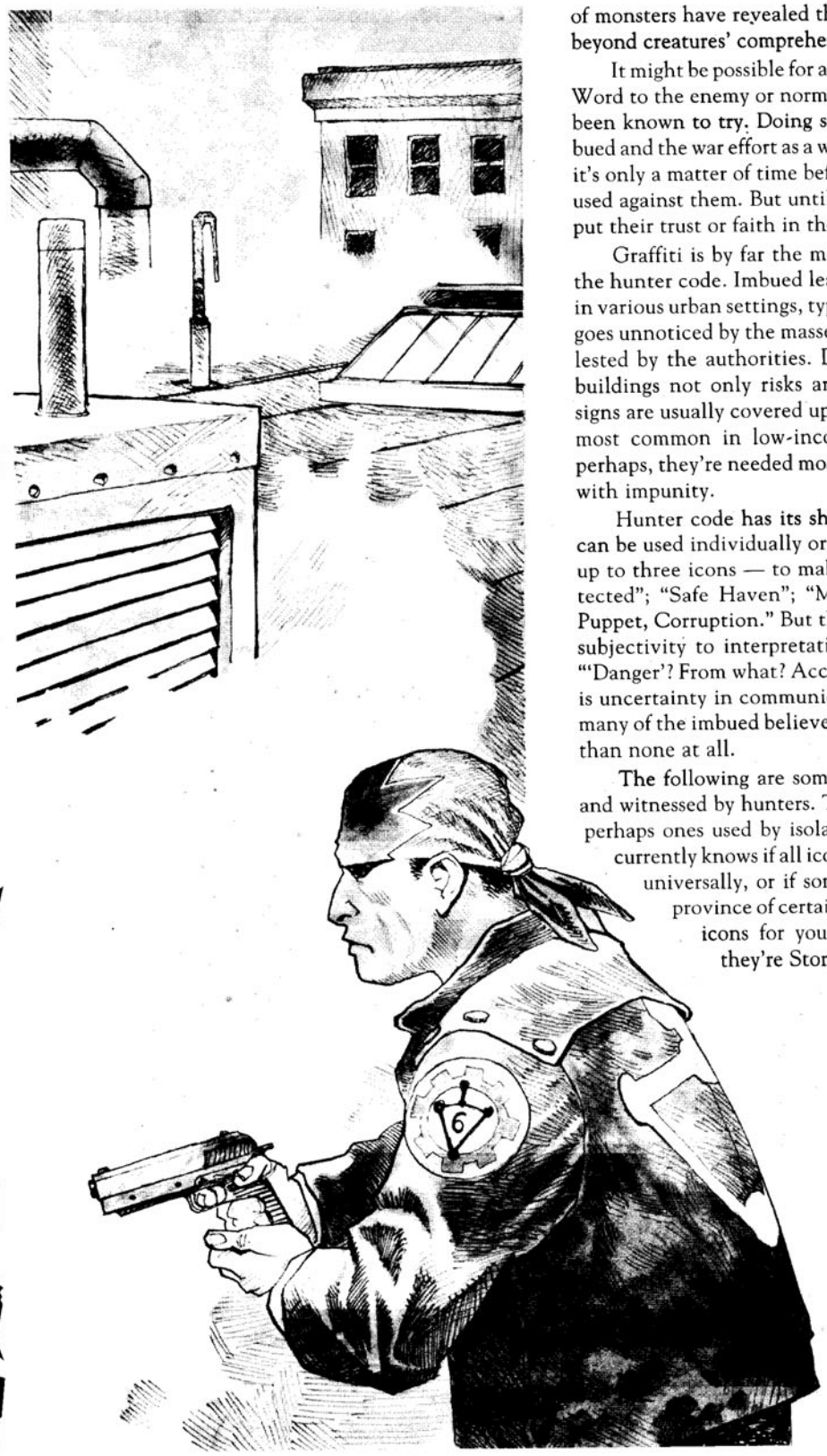
— Isaiah 59:17

APPENDIX I: HUNTER CODE

Upon their imbuing, hunters are bequeathed an intuitive means of communication that transcends any conventional language or dialect. The Messengers instill an understanding, knowledge and sense of application for a series of meaningful symbols. Hunters call this code "the Word." They commonly interpret it and their inexplicable awareness of it as angelic script; an unconscious connection to a previous or lost human culture; or as the receipt of aliens' means of communication, perhaps making the imbued ambassadors of some kind. Ultimately, innate recognition and ability to use these icons is as mysterious as the imbuing and Heralds themselves, and all hunters seek their own answers to what this form of dialogue truly means.

Intuitive understanding of the Word is not necessarily compulsion to use it. A hunter doesn't feel an irresistible urge to scrawl archaic or mystic-seeming symbols. Rather, when hunters seek to reach out to each other, perhaps to find anyone like themselves or to offer a warning to others, these symbols emerge as a natural means to convey the message. Of course, hunters could simply use their existing languages to communicate: "I destroy the unknown. Am I alone?" or "Caution: This place is infested with monsters." However, doing so would play their hand to the enemy and leave them vulnerable. It wouldn't be long before monsters tracked down such expressive graffiti artists or pamphlet authors (perhaps such danger is the greatest weakness of hunternet and similar email lists).

Only hunters seem to understand the Word, and that is its strength. Thus far, there's no indication to suggest that monsters can interpret messages scrawled on subway walls or tenement halls. The symbols have also appeared online, apparently drawn, scanned and posted as communiqués to other imbued, so humanity in general and monsters in particular have witnessed the signs, with no apparent repercussions. Presumably the images are interpreted or dismissed as art or graphics of some kind. Apparently, not even hunters who have fallen to the will



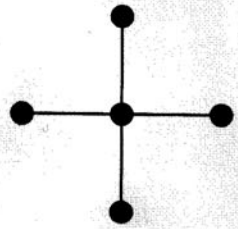
of monsters have revealed the key to the Word, as if it's beyond creatures' comprehension or even notice.

It might be possible for a hunter to reveal or teach the Word to the enemy or normal people. So far, no one has been known to try. Doing so would compromise all imbued and the war effort as a whole. Many hunters fear that it's only a matter of time before their code is broken and used against them. But until that day, they carry on and put their trust or faith in the discretion of their allies.

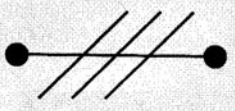
Graffiti is by far the most common means of using the hunter code. Imbued leave the Word for each other in various urban settings, typically where such "artwork" goes unnoticed by the masses, and where it is left unmolested by the authorities. Drawing symbols on upscale buildings not only risks arrest for vandalism, but the signs are usually covered up or erased quickly. Signs are most common in low-income urban areas — where, perhaps, they're needed most: where monsters stalk prey with impunity.

Hunter code has its shortcomings, though. Images can be used individually or in combination — typically up to three icons — to make a simple statement: "Protected"; "Safe Haven"; "Monster, Infested"; "Danger, Puppet, Corruption." But that brevity and the resulting subjectivity to interpretation makes the code cryptic. "'Danger'? From what? According to whom?" The result is uncertainty in communication between hunters. But many of the imbued believe a vague warning to be better than none at all.

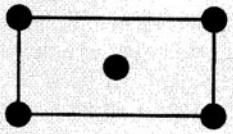
The following are some of the common icons used and witnessed by hunters. There may certainly be more, perhaps ones used by isolated hunter factions. No one currently knows if all icons used by hunters are known universally, or if some symbols are the exclusive province of certain groups. Feel free to make up icons for your own chronicle, as long as they're Storyteller approved.



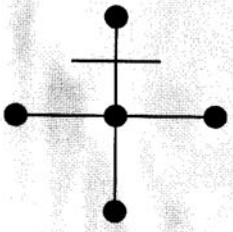
ALLIES/ IMBUED/ CHOSEN



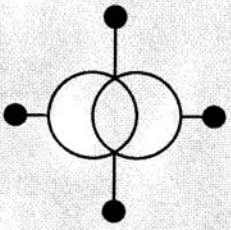
CORRUPTION



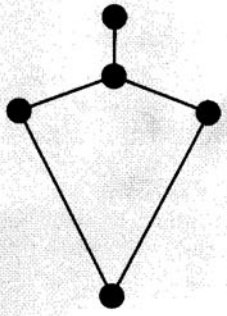
DANGER



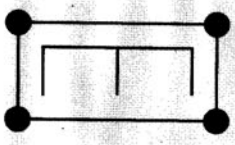
HERALDS/ MESSENGERS



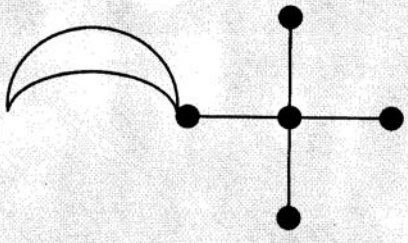
HOPE



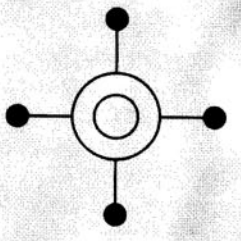
THE HUNT/ MDG/ THE MISSION



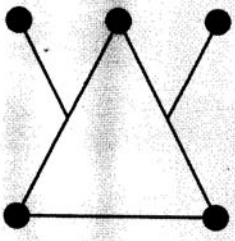
INFESTED



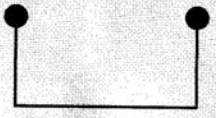
MONSTERS



PROTECTED



PUPPETS



SAFEHAVEN

SECOND SIGHT

Appendix 2: Hunting Gear

You want to take on a bloodsucker with your pocket knife? If you must deal with the walking dead, there are better ways to die.

The biggest difference between experienced and novice hunters generally comes down to equipment. Sure, you can turn to your edges (if you care to put your faith in weird abilities granted by some unseen hand), but when the chips are down, a prepared hunter survives by his own skills and wits. Cocky hunters, inexperienced hunters, unequipped hunters... well, by now you should know what happens to them.

The Hunter's Repertory

When stocking up, there are two major axioms to remember. Unfortunately, they conflict. A hunter's gear must be complete, so that any situation can be faced. However, it must also be portable — fighting man-beasts can't happen when the weight of your gear makes movement impossible. Every good hunter learns to strike a bargain between these two extremes. The best trade-off is to go for multiple utility: portable items that can perform lots of different jobs.

It's no surprise that many hunters adopt a paramilitary style. Military gear makes for a great way to carry lots of survival equipment and weaponry, all with a couple of surplus holsters, rucksacks and harnesses. Your appearance can be intimidating; you're clearly prepared for action and may possess an array of military training. But this sort of appearance can also mark you as a wacko, or it can advertise your intentions. Not only are police suspicious of you, but the enemy may well see you coming and prepare a welcome.

There's a lot to be said for subtlety, for looking like a normal person and avoiding attention. Street clothes or tailored suits, combined with concealed firearms, go a long way toward letting you get close to your quarry. The walking dead don't exactly pay attention to you when you look like another member of the herd. Unfortunately, the cops are more discerning. They tend to notice trench coats in July. If you're wise, you scout out the enemy without attracting attention, and then call in the backup with the artillery.

Some hunters invest a lot of religious significance to the mission. "God made me who I am today." "Allah speaks and we must heed." To each his own. Just don't wear your faith on your sleeve. There's no evidence to suggest that faith or religious symbols have any impact on monsters. Sure, there are stories of fanatics who've turned creatures back with an icon or religious sign, but there are more stories of hunters trying and paying the price. We imbued don't know who imbued us, regardless of what any group believes, so put your faith in yourself as much as in any divinity.

We operate mostly out of necessity. You may have already cleaned out your bank account for the hunt, and now you can't afford gear. You may be in a hurry; the enemy doesn't wait around till you're ready and fully supplied. Or you may always be on the lookout for trouble, but you can't load yourself down at all times. That's when a duffel bag and a few essentials are your best friends. It can suck, and you can get caught short, but it beats going overburdened or unarmed. Recommended items are a variety of small firearms, spare ammo, a couple of hand-held weapons (knives, maybe a hatchet), a floodlight and small flashlight, spare batteries, a first-aid kit, a hammer, pliers and, strangely enough, candy bars and some sports drinks. You never know when you'll hole up to observe a creature; the sugar rush will keep you going.

A couple of tips for novices: Get some sort of body armor. Odds are your prey can take a lot more bullets than you can. Carry at least two weapons, since you'll undoubtedly lose one or discover it does no good. Carry ready cash. (You expect to get mugged?) If you suddenly need to get on that bus or rent a car or whatever, you need cash. Avoid notice. Run if you're recognized. Know the area so you know where to hide. You can strike back whenever *you're* ready. Never hunt without prep work. You'll die without achieving any of your goals.

Guns, Guns, Guns

Nothing evens up the odds like a piece. The enemy may be able to change shapes, hide in people's bodies or claw you open, but a bullet makes a statement — and from a distance. Your target may not skip a beat, but if you're smart enough to come with friends, you might do some collective damage.

Yet there are drawbacks to relying on guns. They may not make a scratch, or they might blow a hole wide enough to climb through, without slowing your opponent a step. Ghosts don't seem to give a damn about firearms. Possession victims don't know enough to care, and its the victim, not the controller, who gets killed. Meanwhile, zombies are killing machines, plain and simple. They don't stop for anything. Don't expect a piece to do the job. You'll get killed for it — or worse, someone else will.

Guns attract attention. Once a firefight breaks out, cops aren't far behind. Now this is not necessarily a bad thing. Seems that some monsters don't want to show their hand, which means they're quick to flee the scene. But if you're intent on finishing one off, that means you have to chase it. Just make sure the hunt remains on your terms, not your target's.

Don't get caught by the cops. They won't understand. They won't sympathize. Some are okay. Some are crooked. Some are under the enemy's thumb. They'll *all* throw your ass in jail. They'll interrogate you. They'll demand to know what you were doing, who you were shooting at, and who else was involved. They won't believe you about monsters, but they will believe you about your allies. Don't rat them out. If the cops are controlled by the enemy, you guarantee your friends' deaths.

Guns leave a paper trail if you get them legally, and they're a sure ticket to prison otherwise. If a few rounds don't find the target, they're an investigator's dotted line. They'll connect the dots to your gun, and then to you.

Getting a gun at all can be difficult and expensive. You could lack the connections or you might be in a hurry and unable to wait for registration. In places outside the U.S., like Canada and Japan, gun laws are even more strict. You're screwed.

If you can get a piece, know what you need. If you want to shred a zombie, you need something hefty. A 9mm isn't going to piss off something that's already dead. If your opposition is people who've been subverted, a concealable and readily available small-caliber weapon is the way to go. Don't bother with rifles unless you're creating a setup (it's not like you can run around the streets at night with a hunting rifle). Should you be dumb enough to "go fishing," by all means bring a rifle, and remember that .22 long-rifle rounds are about the most common ammunition available. If you wear a trench coat, the sawed-off shotgun is your best friend: concealable, but able to take out almost anything — and at short range.

About firearm accessories: laser sights, night vision and suppressers are all great. They're also expensive, and they show that you're a pro (or trying to be one). Since odds are that nobody believes you're hunting zombies, that means professional hitman. Don't go overboard. A laser sight, scope or other piece of high-tech wizardry can quickly reduce the concealability and maneuverability of a weapon; factor in these losses when counting the possible gains.

(Firearms and firefight rules are covered in Chapter 7.)

Military Weapons and Explosives

Hunters aren't the military. They're normal people who stand up, once and for all. They don't have any official training. That said, don't try to use military weapons, even if you can get them. Supply officers keep

meticulous records of everything from paper clips to M1A2s, so you *will* get caught. Thirty rounds of 5.56mm NATO in six seconds may sound like a good idea, but automatic weapons are designed to suppress multiple enemies and force them to stay down, not to rip an entire clip into a lone target. If you haven't served a military stint, you won't be able to handle the recoil from an automatic weapon, anyway.

The only automatic weapon worth recommending is the submachine gun. Most guns in this class can be concealed with some effort. You can control them. They're easy to service. And they're available commercially (if you take the time to convert them to automatic fire). Still, save them for the parties with lots of goons. A full-automatic weapon is a waste of time against a lone enemy.

Explosives are just plain dumb: You *might* kill the target, but you *will* kill other people, quite possibly yourself and your allies. If you think local police are bad, wait until you deal with federal special task forces hunting you for using demolitions. Once you go down that road (and some wackos have), your partners may have to turn their attention on you.

(See the Explosives rules, p. 207.)

Chop Chop

Nine rounds from a .357 Desert Eagle and the damn thing is still coming — and laughing! Sometimes bullets don't do the trick, *but you still have to*, so you have to get medieval. That means getting face to whatever-they-call-face. That means knives, axes, machetes or even swords — whatever the hell will drive the thing back into the grave.

Most hand weapons are easy to conceal, like many versatile firearms. A knife or hatchet can fit almost anywhere on your body. But is that enough? Using one of these means getting within *inches* of the enemy. A machete or sword has a lot more heft to it, and lends some distance, but you can't hide those things, so plan accordingly. Take a blade only when you know you can get away with it: in ambushes, setups or traps. Hide it somewhere in the area, somewhere you know you'll be and where you know you can get at it: in some bushes, in a trash can or a dumpster. Walking down the street with a sword only draws the worst kind of attention.

A well-made bladed weapon is *heavy*. Modern construction techniques can make swords that are relatively light and strong, but swinging around three feet of steel is exhausting. You don't want to wear yourself down in the process of taking out the enemy.

Fortunately, big blades do seem to cause considerable distress for goons. Most seem to prefer to keep limbs, even when they can grow back. Keep a cavalry saber or machete in the garage. It could come in handy.

Fire!

Hunters with a little experience — who've survived a brush with the things out there — quickly discover that fire is a universal weapon. Monsters aren't human or natural, but they fear fire like everyone and everything else.

The trick is controlling fire; turning it on the enemy without getting burned. Acetylene torches, flame-throwers, heating coils, lighters and aerosol sprays all have potential, but fire tends to get out of hand. Not a big issue when a house is full of goons, but burning down an entire apartment complex is going too far.

A makeshift (or real) blowtorch creates a controlled blast. Aerosol spray cans offer a quick burst, but are dangerous (they can explode in your hands) and don't inflict that much damage. A real blowtorch is better, and you can acquire one from most hardware supply stores without questions. Put a line of fire down on a zombie and it's guaranteed to panic. There are all the theological or philosophical implications of the purifying flame, too, but that's all crap.

Unlike guns, fire has to be used at short range. Real flame-throwers don't shoot a simple stream of flame; they create waves of fire. If you can't afford everything to go up in flames around you, you have to be in close. Fire is best used to finish something off or, in desperate circumstances, to destroy a wounded opponent or keep a feisty one back. Make sure that the thing is dust when you're done, too. Some goons come back when you least expect it.

(See the Fire rules, p. 208.)

Vehicles

Hunters don't ask for their new lives, or second sight or edges, but they have them, and for most, the call to use them is irresistible. Some hunters protect designated areas, often their homes and neighborhoods. Others prefer to travel in search of the enemy, maybe because they have no homes left. No matter how you carry out the fight, sooner or later you will have to go in pursuit of the enemy. That means transportation.

Traveling by air is difficult at best for hunters. If you're lucky, you can equip yourself at your destination, so you can climb on board without any incriminating weapons or tools (assuming you can bear going unarmed that long, and that one of *them* isn't on board). More likely, you resort to slower, safer methods of travel, such as the train or boat or car. The last is your best bet; you don't have to make any non-essential stops, and the fewer defenseless around you, the better.

Most hunters resort to whatever vehicles they possessed *before*, be it a motorcycle, a beat-up old car or a rig. In the long run, surviving the road on a motorcycle is

impossible; you can't store everything you need and you're completely exposed. Cargo haulers are too conspicuous and too expensive, even if all your allies can crash in them if need be. Compact cars don't have the cargo capacity. A bunch of guns can fit in the trunk of a car, but what about a body? You may not have the luxury of a home or hotel room, so everything you need (or need to dispose of) has to travel with you.

A truck, van or station wagon is ideal. Station wagons are relatively cheap; the old Volvos are built like tanks. That kind of sturdiness is perfect for a firefight or chase. Don't expect any pickup, though. More likely, you'll be the one getting chased. That's when someone climbs in back and pulls out the artillery. Nobody ever notices the "beat up family car," either, so a station wagon makes for a decent transport when searching for infested sites.

Vans can move a group of hunters, their gear and maybe even a prisoner. The typical van has about as much kick as a station wagon, though, and handles like an ox. A van is ideal for abduction, surveillance or assault, but not so good for rapid response or chases. However, beware those old, beat-up, rusted out piles of crap; they look like serial-killer or child-molester vans and attract attention — especially when they sit for days at a time in a neighborhood or near a schoolyard.

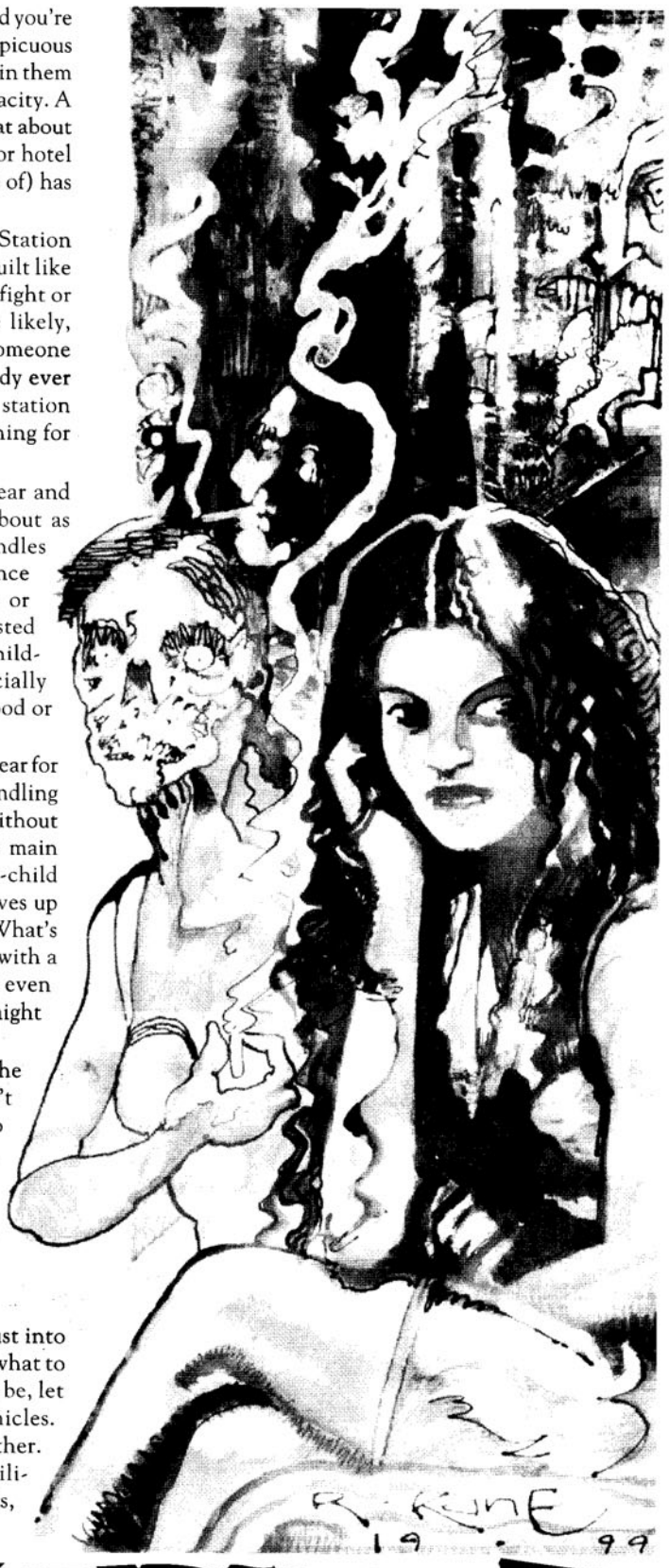
Trucks offer enough space to carry all of your gear for living on the road, and they have pretty good handling and power. They can also look intimidating without necessarily standing out in people's minds. The main problem with trucks is they're trendy. Single-child couples and punk kids love them, which also drives up the price. Don't mess with a new, shiny truck. What's the point of keeping it pretty? Go for a used one with a camper shell to keep all your gear dry. You can even keep a dog in back, to help keep watch for what might visit in the night.

No matter what kind of vehicle you use, the most important tip is: Keep it running. If you don't know shit about engines, get to know people who do. You want that engine to start every time, especially when bloodsuckers are on your ass. You might even get a few extras, like a spare gas tank, built in for emergencies.

(See the Driving rules, p. 181.)

Use Your Brain

You're just an ordinary person suddenly thrust into very unordinary circumstances. You don't know what to make of yourself or the world as it really seems to be, let alone how to get your hands on weapons and vehicles. All hunters go shorthanded at some time or another. Maybe that's why the Heralds give them the abilities they do. But you can't always rely on your gifts,



either; few hunters seem capable of going it alone, not even with the tricks they have up their sleeves. However, there's one weapon that all imbued possess that can never be taken away: imagination. Don't have what you need? Fake it.

The first rule of improvisation: Nothing is sacred. You're fighting goddam monsters to save the lives of everyone you know. Property, memorabilia, and often the law don't mean shit! Larceny isn't a crime when committed in the prevention of offenses to nature. A priceless antique or heirloom isn't worth a hunter's life. Use whatever is at hand; don't hesitate to break, steal or destroy something when the situation demands it. The trick is ensuring that the need is commensurate to the act. Don't destroy homes or sacrifice lives. Otherwise, when you're under the gun, almost anything goes.

The second rule: Think sideways. A fireplace poker makes a decent weapon, but it can also be used to wedge a door shut, break open a window and clear out the glass, or hook an out-of-reach object. A pipe or board not only works as a bludgeon, but can also keep some goons at arm's length, or serve as a makeshift step when jammed against a wall. Don't think in terms of the tool you need. Think about what you want to do, and then look around and see what can be used to do it.

A clever hunter can't be restricted to the intended uses of objects. You have some tools, but not always the right ones. If you need to get attention, you can get it with a gun without hurting anyone. When you need to lower yourself down a hole, use your trench coat as a "rope." You must devise your own uses for every item. It could mean your life.

The third rule: Learn. A trick can work more than once. If you notice that some kinds of enemies have the same tricks, develop your own responses. If a tool proves effective for completely unintended uses, keep using it. You can also learn from your allies. Other hunters have tricks of their own that all can use. Just hope the enemy doesn't catch on.

Storytelling Improvisation

Hunter improvisation isn't difficult to represent — just let the players come up with unusual ways to use gear and assign a slightly higher-than-normal difficulty to the task. If a hunter wants to improvise a set of lockpicks from hairpins, add one or two to the difficulty of the Security roll. Improvised weapons might not suffer such a penalty to attack (unless particularly clumsy or unwieldy), but may have a tendency to break. Improvising such tools effectively is often the purview of a Wits roll, combined with whatever Ability is appropriate (Science, Melee and Security are common).

Some players try to perform remarkable improvisational stunts on the strength of a single roll — "I use Wits + Science to combine those film-developing chemicals with the refrigeration fluid and mix in some styrofoam to get a highly flammable toxic gel, just like I saw on *MacGuyver*!" Such miraculous gadgeteering isn't really appropriate for a gritty, gutter-fighting **Hunter** game. Improvisation is a last-ditch attempt to fit a square tool into a round problem, not a means to solve any problem with an amazing command of movie-science. Most improvisational tools work only once, have a significant difficulty penalty or work only for simple tasks.

Ultimately, improvisation is a storytelling tool. If the Storyteller feels that modifying a particular piece of equipment is appropriate, or that it serves the dramatic purposes of the story, then the characters should be allowed to try. If the proposed innovation breaks the boundaries of logic, common sense or the story, then it's best to say that the attempt is beyond the hunters' capabilities, short of conjuring up a miracle (although when supernatural creatures and otherworldly imperatives are involved...).

Getting the Goods

Hunters need weapons. Weapons aren't cheap, and they often aren't legal. Many of the other tools that hunters use — lockpicks, explosives, body armor — fall into similarly questionable categories. That makes acquisition a top priority, but a difficult one. Some imbued are fortunate enough to have their own stockpiles of material from *before* (see the Arsenal Background, p. 120). For most, a handgun and a pocket knife are the extent of prior weapons experience. You basically have three routes to securing gear: retail, government or crime.

Over the Counter

Lots of useful material is available retail, if you look in the right places. Local ordinances may prohibit the sale of particular weapons and devices; fully automatic weapons are difficult to procure in the United States, and are straight-up illegal elsewhere. Still, most localities sell hunting rifles (of the mundane variety), and some hunters discover that mail order is a direct line to God. Paper trails are a bitch, though: Most over-the-counter weapons and armor require some sort of registration. Even mail-order supplies can be traced. Your best bet is to have material sent to a post-office box under an assumed name, and to close it up quickly afterward.

Retail stores generally carry fairly straightforward supplies: knapsacks, rifles, knives. Specialty shops are a necessity for more esoteric gear such as silencer kits, body armor and swords (it's especially difficult to find *battle-ready* blades; look for full tang and high-tension spring steel). Military surplus and subtle mail order are really the way to go.

Government Supplies

If you're fortunate enough to have contacts in the right branches of the military or police, you can get guns relatively easily. Drugs, armor and "special devices" are even possible, with access to an evidence room or high-ranking officer. Since the government likes to keep a monopoly on the use of deadly force, you'd expect many hunters to resort to government sources for gear.

Truth is, *the government is a hunter's enemy*. Local police forces don't care whether a dead goon was a zombie or a Martian. All they know is that they have a dead body and a maniac using bizarre weapons. Some government agencies are suspected of covering for the opposition, either as part of the government's agenda or because they've been subverted by the enemy. Even for a hunter fortunate enough to count friends among the authorities, there's no easy way to get the goods: Government groups tend to keep meticulous track of all of their materials, right down to wrenches. The rule of thumb is, if a government contact can't be coerced into supplying through family ties, loyalty or friendship, she can't be trusted. If you can buy her, so can anyone else. *Don't trust the government!*

Of course, not all governments are so tightfisted (although they're all corrupted by monsters). If a country's economy is bad or torn by political upheaval or war, just about anything can be for sale, even by the powers that be themselves. Mexico is an infamous source of guns in North America, and is frequently traveled by resourceful hunters.

The only real problem with getting goods from these places is that first-world nations typically have first-class customs officials, so smuggling becomes a necessity. A few simple tips: Never smuggle a weapon through an airport unless it's disassembled and the pieces are in separate bags. Never smuggle in bulk without a deal with the local criminal organizations; they *will* know about it. And never assume the enemy is ignorant of smuggling movements, even if foreign or domestic governments never find out.

Crime Does Pay

Every hunter steps outside the law at some point. Once you accept that, it's just a matter of deciding how far to go. Dedicated hunters understand that there's a line that can't be crossed, and most won't resort to kidnapping or the murder of normal people in the name of the cause. Yet, hunters are no angels; the imbued seem to emerge from all social classes and professions, criminals included. Once these people dedicate themselves to the hunt, they can prove to be assets. They have the contacts and know-how to acquire illegal goods.

The biggest hurdle to dealing with criminal organizations is getting inside. Organized crime works because everybody knows everybody else. Drug dealers sell to people they know. Same goes for guns, information or "services." Even freelancers know go-betweens who investigate prospective deals. Smart criminals minimize their exposure to setups and screw-ups; the dumb ones aren't worth dealing with. Dealing with criminals therefore means establishing a name for yourself, and that requires an introduction.

Arranging a meeting takes time. Those who don't already have ties to "the family" or the local syndicate have to start at the bottom, with the local hoods. Try the vice rings and parts of the organization most likely to be raided — the expendable parts. The scum of the Earth are a protective layer that you must penetrate to get to the top. It takes lots of cash or the willingness to make deals or even compromise your values for the greater good. Big-time players don't waste time selling to penny-ante religious martyrs with a cause. They want something in return — a rival knocked off, a drug ring shut down, perhaps even a robbery staged.

Once you're "inside," all kinds of materials are available, for the right price. Remember, though, that the price is always more than money. Dealing with organized crime puts you in a precarious position. The possibilities of blackmail and extortion are constant; don't reveal the cause or your abilities — not that anyone would believe their eyes, though. Notorious criminals may renege on a deal, taking your money or favors and running. And many criminal organizations are undoubtedly controlled by the enemy. It makes sense; they're everywhere else, with fingers in every other business. Be careful to not contribute to their power in an effort to gain some of your own. Otherwise, gaining weapons and tools from our foe, only to turn them against the enemy, is my favorite irony.

Just don't forget that once you turn to crime for help in the war, there's no going back. You're forever indebted to those elements, regardless of what you believe is equitable. You're therefore subject to scrutiny by their masters. Be careful that in pursuing the mission you don't sacrifice your soul.

Appendix 3: Hunter Organizations

The title of this section is something of a misnomer. The emergence of hunters, as defined by the imbuing, is such a new phenomenon in the World of Darkness that few definite societal lines have been drawn among, between or around the chosen. For the most part, hunters still grapple with their terrifying new environments, the voices they hear, visions they have, and the monsters that they see lurking all around them. Organizing hunter groups and alliances is a distant third to simple survival and sanity. However, given time, adjustment and necessity, hunters do seek

out each other and form bonds, whether in small circles or via long lines of communication.

The following are only some nascent hunter societies that have formed, that strive to emerge or that can appear in the future of your **Hunter** chronicle. Some such groups may have pivotal roles in hunters' fate as a whole. Others are doomed to failure from the outset, given their weak foundations. Still others may be guided by the subtle touch of the very things that hunters would stalk. Your troupe's characters can meet, help found or clash with these groups. Thus, players' characters can rise with shooting stars, or plummet with fallen angels.

The Connell Group

Maximillian Connell's odd organization of hunters is an enigma to many. Based in Boston, Massachusetts, the group has swelled and ebbed in size since its inception only weeks after the appearance of hunter-net online. Although the group seems to have existed for some months, precious little solid information is available on it. Few members speak openly of how the group functions, or say anything to deny or confirm rumors of the founder's strange predilections. What news has reached general hunter circles — from erstwhile members — is both disturbing and (to some) perversely alluring. Perhaps most ominous is the fact that such a young organization already has an array of *former* members.

What is known about the group focuses on its founder, Maximillian Connell. This heir to an industrial fortune is known to have lived a life of luxury and indulgence, and had a passion for game hunting. His family wealth meant he could pursue his avocation across the globe, and his resources and influence allowed him to break various poaching and game laws with impunity.

Connell's life apparently changed when he was confronted by a predator of humans, one intent on making Connell a living prize — and pawn in some nocturnal game. However, it was in that confrontation that the heir was imbued and fought back against his would-be master. Further details of the event are unknown, but it turned the extravagant ne'er-do-well into a brooding obsessive. A whole new world was revealed, and Connell supposedly vowed to conquer it — and its predators — rather than be conquered.

The Connell Group was founded at some point after these events, and comprised other imbued whom the millionaire discovered, funded, protected — and made demands of. Former contributors speak of bizarre (if not frightening or outright disgusting) methods and practices: the price of privilege and protection, and the requirements of membership. Supposedly, Connell initiates normal, unimbued men and women into the hunt for unknown reasons. These people are usually the first to die at supernatural teeth and claws, and Connell dedicates enormous amounts of money to covering up their disappearances.

Other former participants whisper that the millionaire demands proof of each kill: the head and left arm of each supernatural monster destroyed, or a creature's eyes and left hand if nothing else is available. Those few imbued who have met Connell face to face (which is forbidden until a hunter has a significant roster of kills) claim that the patron is missing his left eye and that he lacks use of his left arm, perhaps as a result of his imbuing or a subsequent supernatural encounter. But even these stories go unconfirmed; "successful" group members admit only to meeting with a discreet person who rarely allows himself to be seen fully.

Perhaps current (and many former) group members are so hesitant to reveal all they know about Connell and his hunter society for fear of reprisal. The founder seems to possess a great deal of information about all the people to whom he extends offers of camaraderie, funding, allies and opportunities to strike at the unknown. His promises appeal most strongly to the recently imbued, who have no one else to turn to. But with time, Connell's freakish demands drive many people away, and knowledge of his extremes keeps them tight-lipped. Yet there are hunters who remain in Connell's sphere of influence, perhaps due to fear, safety concerns or even some mutually disturbed thrill of the hunt. And, of course, Connell is always in search of new recruits.

The Moderators

Not every man or woman who hears the Heralds' message responds to the supernatural terrors that haunt the night. Some people, known as bystanders in hunter circles, simply freeze with indecision when confronted with the greater, horrifying truth the Messengers reveal. These people are shepherded to or happen upon encounters with the supernatural. Their eyes are opened to reality, but they do not *act*. Left without hunters' edges (as punishment for cowardice, according to some), but still fully aware of the creatures that prey upon humanity, bystanders are outsiders among the outsiders. And yet, not every such person can sit idly by as things that should not be stalk the defenseless.

One bystander has begun to organize others who hesitated. Stephen Lambert has convinced many bystanders, lurkers, ailing or retired hunters and those otherwise unable to continue the fight to join him in gathering evidence of and intelligence on supernatural activity. Many joined his cause when he made his name known to the burgeoning hunter community. He announced his guilt and shame on hunter-net, apparently after failing to stop a walking corpse from attacking and crippling his wife in Manhattan. Despite the warnings posted all over the website, Lambert also revealed his address and phone number to offer what little help he

could to any hunters who, in Lambert's words, "do every night what I failed to do just once."

Coordinating a ring of reclusive, paranoid and secretive associates, Lambert gathers any information he can on potential hunter targets and makes that intelligence available to the imbued who dare trust him. He refuses to investigate those who agree to become fellow Moderators (a name reflecting Lambert's hunter-net handle, Moderator87), which makes many hunters wary of Lambert's information. The bystander maintains that individual Moderators' privacy is what allows them to do their work, even if they must keep secrets from their leader himself. To date, no hunters are known to have complained of "bum intel." Of course, Lambert's detractors are quick to point out that if a Moderator gave bad information, there wouldn't be any hunters left to complain. Lambert remains above the fray for the most part, staying out of hunter-net controversies and continuing to offer supernatural reconnaissance where it seems most needed.

Information on how the Moderators operate is spotty at best. Lambert claims to use surveillance equipment "borrowed" from a private investigator. He scours supermarket tabloids for articles that match familiar patterns. He even uses himself as bait for more social predators. He does not answer questions about why he goes to such dangerous (some would say suicidal) lengths to provide hunters with information. Countless theories (from cheap psychoanalyses to astute observations) abound. Regardless, no other Moderators have come forward to reveal how they gather their information — and, doubtless, many have died developing their methods. Most hunters are content to not ask.

All that is known for sure is the procedure most Moderators have adopted in delivering information. Once sufficient intelligence is gathered on a target, Lambert (or one of his followers) contacts hunters in the area of the disturbance via hunter-net. He invites them to join him in an online chat room or on a personal email list. Once in contact with a potential group, the Moderator disseminates the information, encourages the hunters to meet one another in person, and signs off with the tag-line "For the Weak."

Despite pressure, Lambert refuses to explain the significance of the phrase, though all Moderators use it. Many of the researchers can only guess at what it means. Yet the few core members in regular contact with Lambert agree that he insists on the line being used.

In order to protect Moderator secrecy and safety, Lambert enforces a strict noninterference policy. No Moderator may make face-to-face or phone contact with potential hunters, or with each other. In fact, he is the only one to have stated his name "publicly" since the group's inception. Even the number of Moderators at large is a matter of conjecture, as is the range of the group's scope within and outside its United States base.

La Croisade de L'enfant (The Child's Crusade)

Her name is Noëlle. She is 12 years old and claims to have been an orphan in Marseilles prior to her imbuing by the "supernal light of Jeanne d'Arc." Supposedly, this "spirit" delivered Noëlle from her orphanage and revealed to her the dead things that walk the Earth. To contend with these *cauchemars*, the saints — no doubt Margaret of Antioch and Catherine of Alexandria — blessed others and gathered them to the imbued youngster. Under Noëlle's banner, they seek to cleanse the south of France of the otherworldly beings that plague it. Noëlle's disciples would gladly die in her name, and several have already been so honored.

Following several successful urban campaigns, "Jeanne d'Arc" guides the girl and her followers into the countryside to wait as the Heralds gather more Blessed to her service. Soon, the saints tell the girl, L'Innocente (as Noëlle is called) and her followers must march on Paris, expose the evil there and purge it from the Earth. To serve Noëlle is to serve the Lord; to fight for her is to fight for God and France. At least, these are the proclamations the Crusaders make to the other imbued of France.

The truth is less inspiring. The religious fervor that initially grips Noëlle's adherents, which impels them to exalt her in saintly fashion, soon fades into uncertainty, confusion and suspicion. The girl, beatific with her red locks, guileless eyes and radiant demeanor, gradually develops odd habits and makes strange requests of her Blessed followers. Rather than renew their sweeps of Monaco, Nice and Marseilles, Noëlle sequesters the group in an abandoned farmhouse near Arles.

Noëlle begins to wander by night from the sanctuary of the Blessed to pray alone and "speak with Michael." Guy Saillot, newly recruited and skeptical of the girl's claims, follows her on several such outings to witness for himself the source of the girl's divine inspiration. Ironic, Guy reflects, that his own "divine gifts" should expose L'Innocente as a plaything of the very creatures the Crusade has been assembled to destroy. Noëlle is no savior, but an imbued under the sway of the enemy, beguiled no doubt to keep her followers away from southern France's cities, the true home of the country's night-creatures.

After word of the truth is announced, fully a third of Noëlle's followers desert the sanctuary, despite her pleading. Most return to their hometowns to deal with the specters and other things lurking in the shadows. This "betrayal" devastates Noëlle, but a devoted rabble remains at her side (when not her feet).

Noëlle is the pillar upon which her remaining Blessed lean, the one who helps them forget — if briefly — their

past lives. Noëlle's company alone provides a cathartic release from the pressures and paranoia of life on the hunt. She possesses a peculiar gift for absolving her supplicants of their anger, divisiveness and fear. For some of them, Noëlle can do no wrong. Nevertheless, her behavior grows more erratic with each passing week. Her "Messengers" demand a certain doll, an old set of paintbrushes, a tattered children's book and other innocuous objects. Although her Blessed gradually locate these items, Noëlle alone carries the stuff into the nearby woods. Days when the voices speaking through her seem less than angelic increase, as do nights when Noëlle seems truly not herself.

Worry begins to rule the Crusaders. After all, even her most devoted followers know what happened to the *first* Jeanne d'Arc.

The Conscience of Earth

The collective calling itself the Conscience of Earth travels throughout North America and preaches to any who would hear its message. The group remains tight-lipped to any curious imbued, however. Members travel in two separate groups, the first of which — the "Guides" — arrives in a city by night. The "Huntsmen" follow in two RVs. The scouts comb the city for two nights preceding the others' arrival, seeking out and tracking whatever supernatural beings cross their paths. Trails left by their quarry are often a signal to observant local hunters that the imbued are at work in the city.

The Huntsmen typically arrive at a city on a Friday afternoon and locate a public park likely to draw weekend crowds. They erect a pavilion and collect what information the Guides have uncovered. Free refreshments and pamphlets greet early park visitors. The handouts vaguely and innocuously detail the promises of enlightenment to be found in "the message." At midday, the Huntsmen cajole listeners into the "shade of the tent" to await the message's delivery.

The group's orator is Elias, a tall, robust man with piercing eyes and a talent for reading a crowd and tailoring his sermon to its interests. Though his speeches are presented in a revival vein, they do not involve fire-and-brimstone vitriol. Elias' message offers a path to "awareness, enlightenment and spiritual evolution," but warns those "spiritual misers who would remain in the cancerous cells of the social norm," rather than join the developing "collective soul of humankind." Elias sprinkles his homilies with vague references to "shadows in our midst," allusions that become slightly more concrete upon each return engagement. The preacher delivers the word twice each Saturday and Sunday, in the afternoon and evening. The Huntsmen then pack up the tent and the Conscience of Earth moves on to its next destination.

Any curious supernatural creature attending one of Elias' sermons leaves a Trail as it departs, courtesy of vigilant Hunts- men. Guides do not provoke encoun- ters with the monsters unless forced to. Their goal is to pierce the guises and observe the activities of such beings and report them to the Huntsmen, who consequently possess detailed files on several known monsters throughout the country. Similarly, Elias does not seek to win immediate converts to the Conscience of Earth, a fact he makes explicit during his speeches. Rather, he slowly exposes his listeners to the truth of the world, one scintilla at a time, so that when the reckoning comes, hunters and humanity will emerge victorious and the next age of man can begin.

The Conscience of Earth hunters consider themselves beyond mere revolutionaries against dark forces. They believe themselves to be *evolutionaries* taking the next step in man's ascension toward true divinity. Whether the Messengers are preternatural representations of humanity's collective unconsciousness, or the very same devas, bodhisattvas and angels of which Elias speaks in his sermons is a subject of some debate within the group. Current consensus holds that the Messengers are indeed entities with a complex agenda, and that the hunters are their avatars on Earth. Yet the discomforting question remains: If Elias preaches the truth about the Messengers' goal for hunters and humanity, why do other hunters have such differing views on the imbuing and its benefactors?

The Church of Vindicated Faith

For an organization receiving the degree of media scrutiny that it does, the Church of Vindicated Faith's secrecy remains surprisingly intact. Regarded with suspicion by public officials and local law-enforcement agencies, this insular collective based in California approaches the hunt with a religious fervor that crosses the line between devotion and fanaticism. With the new millennium, the Vindicated expect nothing less than the fulfillment of the Revelation. The leader's identity is a matter of widespread speculation among nonbelievers. His disciples refer to him only by the title "Crucifer," when they speak of him at all. He is supposedly bold, unyielding in his convictions, and utterly certain that he and his followers are the very Elect of God. The Crucifer and his disciples actively pursue others who have undergone the *metanoia*, usually seeking them out among other congregations and inviting the worthy to worship at the Church. The CVF also urges those who Witness the *metanoia* and the minions of the Beast to join their ranks. It supplies miraculous incentives to encourage their devotion. These Witnesses are the eyes and ears of the Vindicated and provide meeting places and the necessary funds with which to fight the Final Battle.

Through the *metanoia*, God imparts His Elect with the powers necessary to exorcise the world of its demons, a task these paladins take to assiduously. The Vindicated are not averse to direct confrontation, but they prefer to stalk and analyze an enemy over a period of days or weeks, followed by a highly coordinated and lethal strike. While driven, these hunters are careful to leave no trace of their nocturnal activities, especially when directed against demonic wolves in sheep's clothing. Despite their caution, the Vindicated have not escaped encounters with the law entirely. Police know Kyle McBride and John Tang, early disciples of the Crucifer, through two separate stalking incidents that brought the CVF to the attention of the district attorney and other hunters.

The attention currently focused on the group by the local judiciary is lax compared to the scrutiny other imbued apply. The chiliastic viewpoint of the Vindicated, combined with their fanatical devotion to the Revelation and the hunt, unnerve other imbued who have dealt with them or followed their activities. Outsiders worry at the increasing extremism displayed by the group. They point to a recent attack on the walking dead — and the deaths of several defenseless — as justification for their concerns. Rumors of communion taken with the blood of monstrous victims and of a reliquary containing artifacts recovered from successful hunts fuel these concerns. There is a growing consensus among West Coast hunters that the Church needs to be contained.

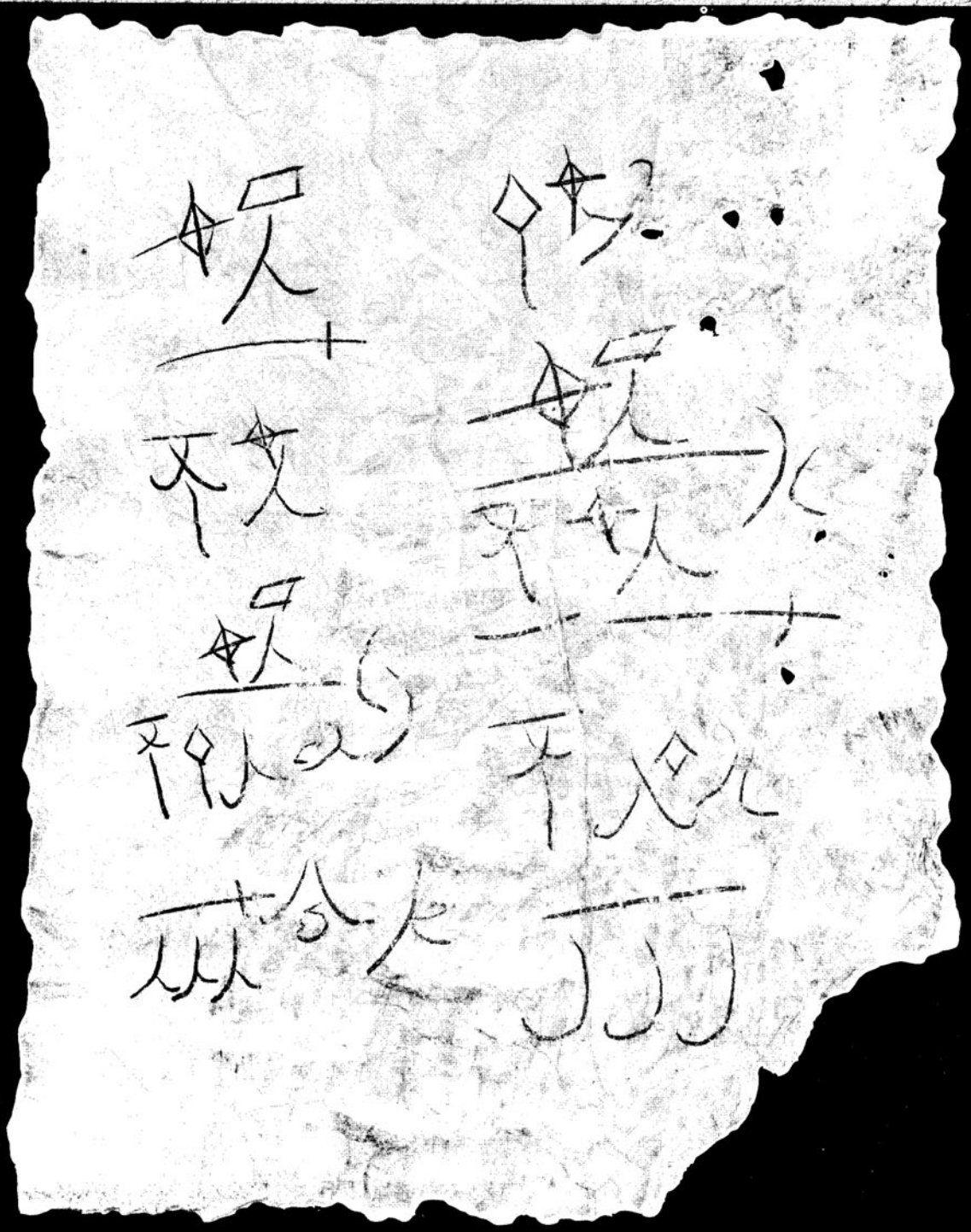
Naturally, the CVF regards any interference with its activities as tantamount to alliance with evil. Some hunters, the Vindicated say, are merely misguided. If they do not accept the Divine Truths imparted to them by God through the *metanoia*, at least they act in accordance with the Truths' tenets. Others, however, have clearly not escaped enticement by the minions of the One Below. To all appearances, such reprobates are no different than the misguided, but direct interference with the Church betrays the true allegiance of these fallen servants of the Lord. Additionally, ongoing investigation by the police and media eventually convinces the CVF of the Devil's involvement in these institutions. It seems that the forces of Hell are everywhere and in direct opposition to the Vindicated. "Many are called, but few are chosen," quotes the Crucifer, and his congregation has no doubt which few the Lord will elect to salvation and who will suffer preterition when the Revelation is fulfilled.

Internet Browser: Hunter-Net - Home Page

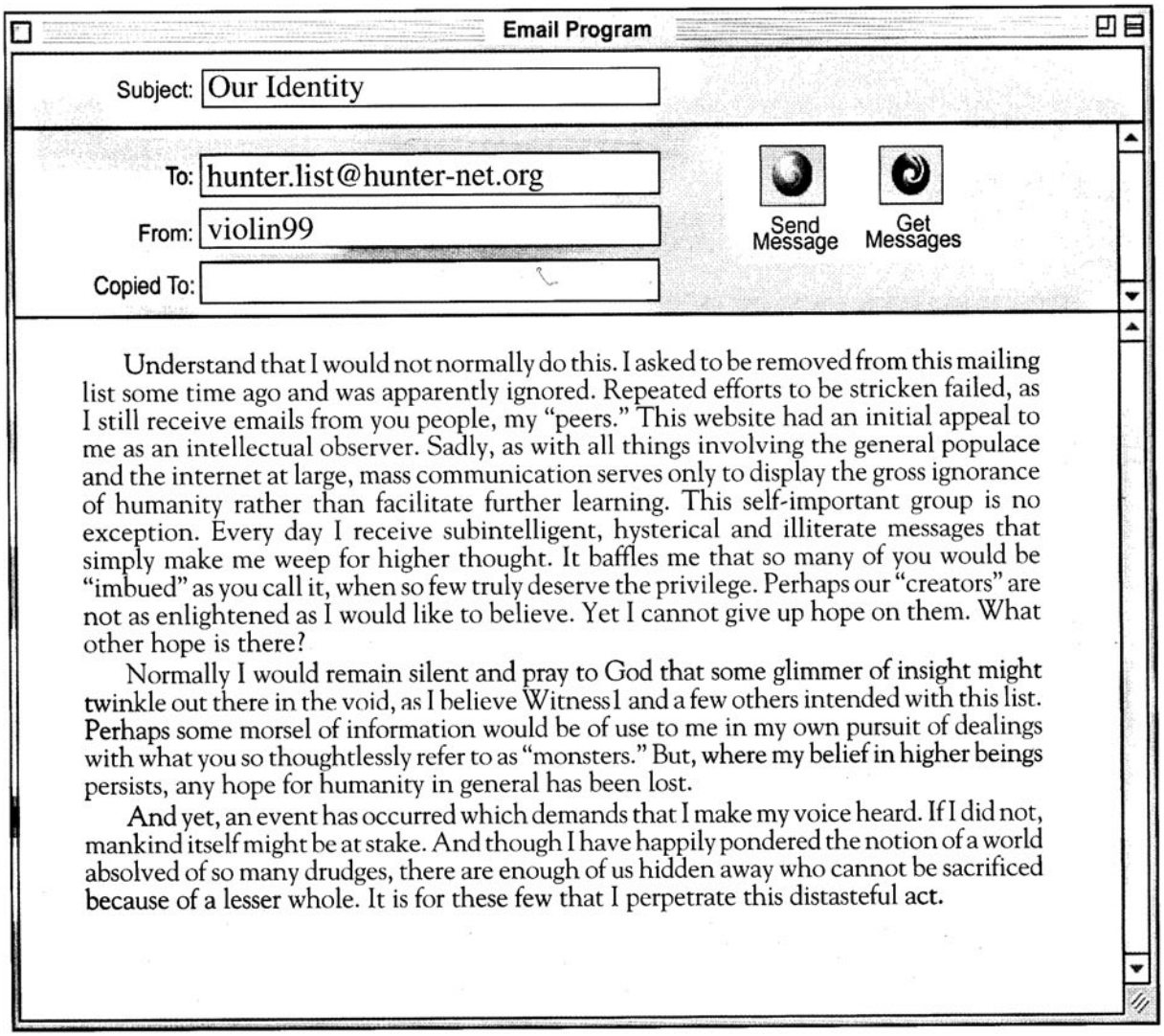
Backward Forward Redraw Stop Findit! Homepage History Printing Save Preferences

HTML site: http://www.hunter-net.org/home/chat.html

Welcome to Hunter-Net



EPILOGUE



Understand that I would not normally do this. I asked to be removed from this mailing list some time ago and was apparently ignored. Repeated efforts to be stricken failed, as I still receive emails from you people, my "peers." This website had an initial appeal to me as an intellectual observer. Sadly, as with all things involving the general populace and the internet at large, mass communication serves only to display the gross ignorance of humanity rather than facilitate further learning. This self-important group is no exception. Every day I receive subintelligent, hysterical and illiterate messages that simply make me weep for higher thought. It baffles me that so many of you would be "imbued" as you call it, when so few truly deserve the privilege. Perhaps our "creators" are not as enlightened as I would like to believe. Yet I cannot give up hope on them. What other hope is there?

Normally I would remain silent and pray to God that some glimmer of insight might twinkle out there in the void, as I believe Witness1 and a few others intended with this list. Perhaps some morsel of information would be of use to me in my own pursuit of dealings with what you so thoughtlessly refer to as "monsters." But, where my belief in higher beings persists, any hope for humanity in general has been lost.

And yet, an event has occurred which demands that I make my voice heard. If I did not, mankind itself might be at stake. And though I have happily pondered the notion of a world absolved of so many drudges, there are enough of us hidden away who cannot be sacrificed because of a lesser whole. It is for these few that I perpetrate this distasteful act.

Email Program

A singular item that has recently come into my possession is causing me profound distress. Do not concern yourself with how it arrived in my hands. Simply accept that a unique acquaintance has supplied me with it, clearly in recognition of my studiousness and keen perspective.

This object seems to suggest possibilities that apply not only to myself, but to all of us chosen. It is a very ancient parchment, perhaps once bound into a scroll. The paper is very brittle; a gentle breeze causes it to crack, and even mild temperature changes are sufficient to cause the fabric to yellow. The material seems like rice paper, as used in the Far East since recorded history's start (and very likely longer, as I will explain). It astonishes me that something seemingly so old and delicate could still exist, and yet here it is before my eyes.

My mysterious benefactor provided no origins for the item, and made no mention about how he might have attained it. I suspect that it has been procured from an archive or museum of some sort, maybe Asian or perhaps some English collection of colonial acquisitions. Unless my acquaintance purchased the parchment, I can only assume that it was gained illicitly, for who could ever part with such a treasure willingly?

I have reproduced the face of the paper and posted it for your inspection. As you can see, there is some form of script penned on it. Much of the writing has faded, been marred, lost or destroyed, but enough icons remain to allow some kind of translation — or so I originally thought. As a scholar, I hoped to learn the text's meaning simply by researching old-form Asian script to identify similar or related symbols. My investigation quickly proved more difficult than anticipated. The symbols were not like any Asian language that I could identify, and yet their line work, shape and form begged a connection.

Without revealing my true nature of these past months, or how I came into possession of the parchment, I contacted a onetime correspondent, a professor in Hong Kong. He received the same image that I have posted here. I thought, with his native catalog of history and record, that he might identify the text immediately. He could not. In fact, it was some time before he contacted me again, baffled by the images. He recognized similarities in very old Chinese, Korean and Indian script, but could ascribe this writing to none of them. Rather, he posited that it might be a precursor to even those written languages! As I said, astonishing.

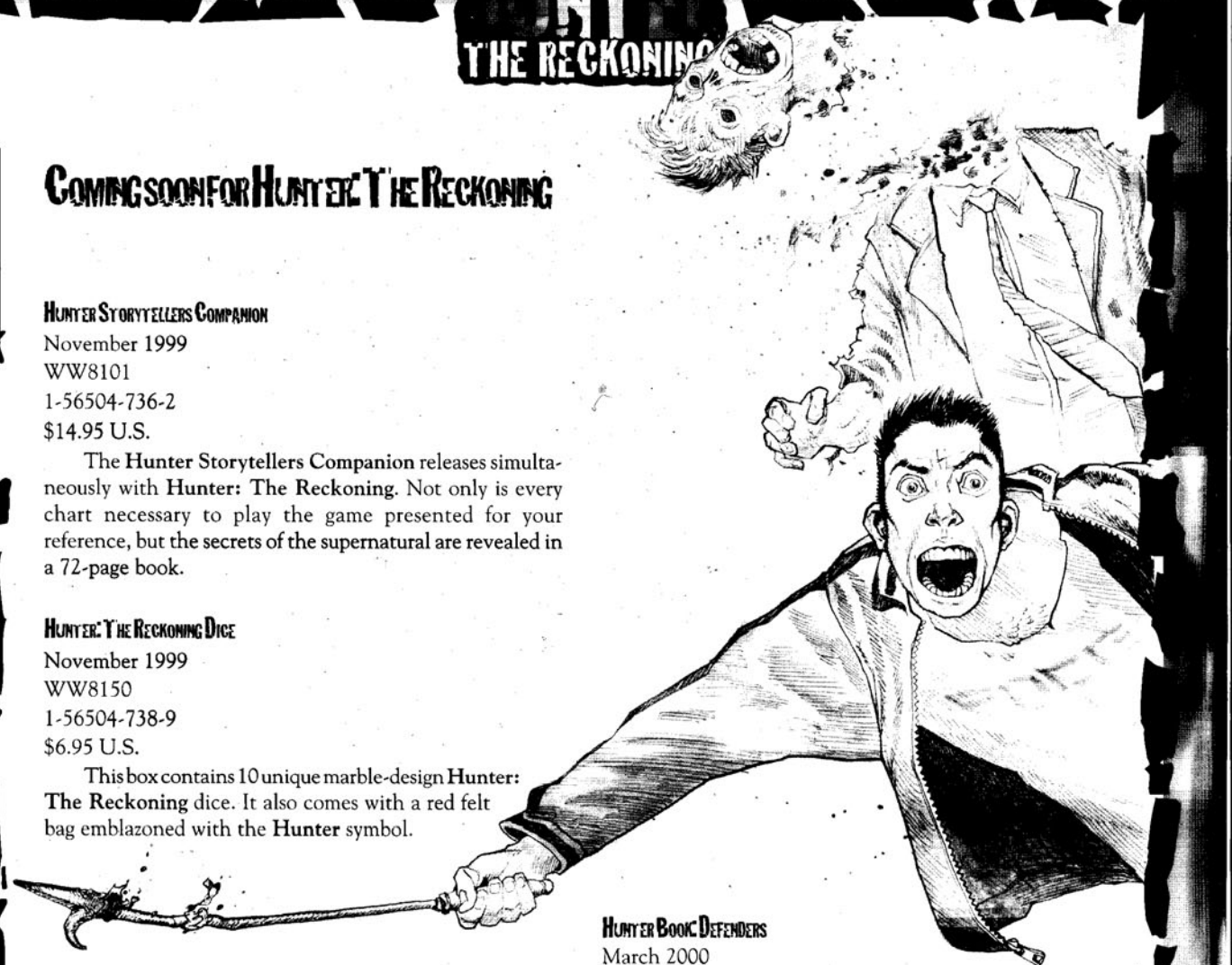
My colleague insisted that I send him the original document immediately; that it should be studied firsthand, dated for authenticity. I refused, of course. I assumed from my associate's ignorance of the item that it came from no known — or legitimate — source, so I saw no harm in retaining ownership. Surely my benefactor provided me with the parchment to pursue it with my own resources and faculties, not to relinquish it to another.

I requested, then, that my would-be translator suggest what the icons might mean, based upon comparison to any languages that could have evolved from them afterward. He tentatively ventured these words and phrases, separated in text but interpreted in the following order: "heaven's chosen, protectors, Golden Age, temptation, hope, fall, demons, destruction."

As I said earlier, I normally would not reveal myself on this list and endanger my activities and life by beckoning whatever it is that might lurk out there among you. And yet, as exclusive as I might be, not even I can remain quiet while this document poses burning questions. After the perhaps millennia that this parchment might have existed, after all the seasons, life and death that have transpired from who knows when until now, after all that we chosen have been exposed to, seen, confronted and in some cases destroyed: What happens when an apparently bygone age of "demons," "heroes" and "divine beings" — an almost painful corollary to our current reality — returns?

For the love of God, what are we?

Coming Soon for Hunter: The Reckoning



Hunter Storytellers Companion

November 1999
WW8101
1-56504-736-2
$14.95 U.S.

The **Hunter Storytellers Companion** releases simultaneously with **Hunter: The Reckoning**. Not only is every chart necessary to play the game presented for your reference, but the secrets of the supernatural are revealed in a 72-page book.

Hunter: The Reckoning Dice

November 1999
WW8150
1-56504-738-9
$6.95 U.S.

This box contains 10 unique marble-design **Hunter: The Reckoning** dice. It also comes with a red felt bag emblazoned with the **Hunter** symbol.

Hunters Survival Guide

December 1999
WW8102
1-56504-737-0
$19.95 U.S.

The **Hunters Survival Guide** is *the* source on stalking monsters and living to tell the tale. This book updates hunters on brethren activities worldwide. It spreads word about the most dangerous game across the globe, and offers tips on how to fight and defeat the enemy.

Hunter Book: Avengers

February 2000
WW8103
1-56504-739-7
$14.95 U.S.

Hunter Book: Avengers is the first in a new **Hunter: The Reckoning** series dedicated to the creeds, the character types of the imbued. Learn Avengers' philosophies, motives and ultimate goals in the war against the supernatural.

Hunter Book: Defenders

March 2000
WW8104
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$14.95 U.S.

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Take Back the Night

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